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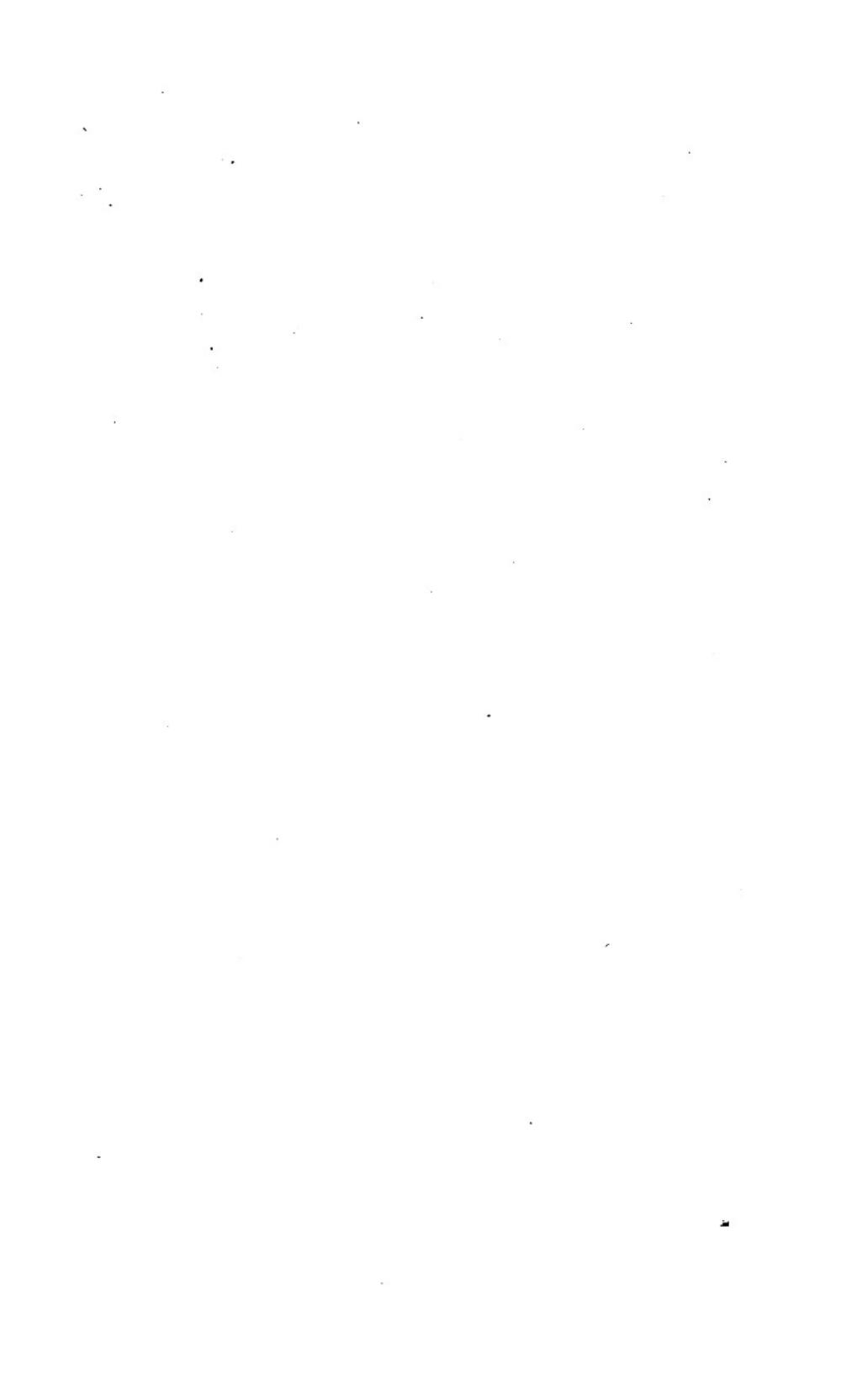
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ASHDOWN PARSONAGE
SIXTY YEARS SINCE



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BY

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OF TRINITY CHURCH, LAMBETH, AND LATE RECTOR
OF BARFREYSTONE, KENT.

LONDON :

JOHN F. SHAW AND CO.,
48, PATERNOSTER ROW, AND 27, SOUTHAMPTON ROW.
1864.

250.m. 272.

HARRISLD, PRINTER, LONDON.





*It is particularly requested, orders for this book,
sent to the writer, through the publisher.*

PREFACE.

THIS Tale, begun in happier years, was completed by the writer, when on the verge of FOURSOME, in the shadowed days of bereavement, and unlooked-for poverty.



ASHDOWN PARSONAGE SIXTY YEARS SINCE.

CHAPTER I.

"Good morning, papa," said Ellen Hamilton, entering the library, which also served for a breakfast-room at Ashdown Parsonage.

"How is your mother, Ellen?" said Mr. Hamilton, who was looking at the weather-glass.

"Rather better this morning, papa, but she feels this extreme cold; I think mamma said extreme."

"It is indeed piercing, and we shall have, I predict, a heavy fall of snow before night."

"Oh, poor Dame Egerton, I hope we shall be able to go and see her, do not you, Jessie?" said Ellen to her sister, who came in at that moment.

"Kiss me, papa," said Jessie, "and say Yes."

"My dear, it does not depend on my saying 'yes,' it depends on the weather. If you finish your lessons in time, I am very willing to walk with you to the old pool. Ring the bell, I am quite ready."

Dawson, the cook, Ruth, old Andrew, and Ralph, now came in to prayers.

"Dawson," said Jessie to the servant who remained after they were finished, to take up her lady's breakfast, "does Andrew think it will snow?"

"I do not know, Miss Jessie," said Dawson, quietly walking out of the room with the tray.

"Dawson never does know anything," observed Jessie; "but pray give me some tea, Ellen, and do not look out of the window."

"I am watching Roger, and wondering what he is at."

"Why, Ellen," said her papa, looking up from the newspaper which he was reading, "he is putting peas-haulm round the stocks, and on the gentian and other plants, which prove that Andrew does not think it will snow, though I do. Jessie, there is your robin on the sill of the window, and blackbird, and some chaffinches, they are good judges of the weather, and come to provide for themselves before the snow comes; birds are sensible of atmospheric changes sooner than man. Muff, too, is very sleepy this morning, and only stretches out her paw when she is called. I think the robin might come under the table, and she would not see it."

"She is sleeping with her head on the rug too, papa, and her face turned up. Rover, Rover, you have frightened away my birds," added Jessie, to a black spaniel with very long ears, who just then made his appearance on the lawn. "Papa, you said 'atmospheric' just now, I do not know what atmospheric means."

"Do you know what atmosphere means?"

"No, not exactly."

"Do you, Ellen?"

"I think, papa, it is the air which surrounds us."

"Right, my dear; now, Jessie, can you tell what meant?"

"Yes, papa; air changes."

"Or changes in the air, eh! Where did you walk to this morning?"

"To the old mill, papa, and oh! how beautiful the icicle were on the mill-wheel, which stood quite still; but the stream was not frozen, it was running and gurgling away. The ice looked like fretwork; we should have liked to look at it longer but we knew we had not time, for Jacob and the donkey came up, and he was lifting off the sacks from his back, and going in to his breakfast. He and the donkey put me in mind of the sand toy my aunt sent us; don't you remember, papa, the wheel was going round, and a boy chopping at a block."

"I think I do remember something about it; but have you ever read Cowper's description of a water-mill on a frosty morning?"

"No, papa."

"Fetch me that purple morocco book from the second shelf, and I will read it to you."

"On the flood

Indurated and fixed, the snowy weight
 Lies undissolved ; while silently beneath,
 And unperceived, the current steals away.
 Not so, where scornful of a check it leaps
 The mill-dam, dashes on the restless wheel,
 And wantons in the pebbly gulph below.
 No frost can bind it there ; its utmost force
 Can but arrest the light and smoky mist,
 That in its fall the liquid sheet throws wide.
 And see where it has hung the embroider'd banks,
 With forms so various, that no pow'rs of art,
 The pencil or the pen, may trace the scene !
 Here glittering turrets rise, upbearing high
 (Fantastic misarrangement!), on the roof,
 Large growth of what may seem the sparkling trees,
 And shrubs of fairyland. The crystal drops,
 That trickle down the branches fast congeal'd,
 Shoot into pillars of pellucid length,
 And prop the pile they but adorn'd before.
 Here grotto within grotto safe defies
 The sunbeam ; there, imboss'd and fretted wild,
 The growing wonder takes a thousand shapes
 Capricious, in which fancy seeks in vain
 The likeness of some object seen before.
 Thus nature works, as if to mock at art,
 And in defiance of her rival pow'rs ;
 By these fortuitous and random strokes,
 Performing such inimitable feats,
 As she with all her rules can never reach."

"Thank you, papa," said both his daughters.

"I think Cowper must have seen this very mill-wheel," said Ellen.

"No, my child, Cowper lived at Olney, in Buckinghamshire, when he wrote these lines. I have a print in my portfolio, which I will show you, and which, by and by, you may copy if you will."

"Shall I ever draw, papa?" asked Jessie.

"Not unless you show a greater taste for it than you do at present. Your drawings are like some outlandish animals—indeed not like any animal at all, and your trees are anything but trees. My dear, do not eat so fast."

"I am very hungry, papa."

"That is no reason why you should eat so unlike a young lady. I cannot think where you could acquire this remarkably disagreeable habit; I hope you will correct it, I most particularly dislike it."

"I am afraid the hyacinths will not grow this weather," said Ellen, looking at her hyacinths.

"Yes they will, Ellen, provided the frost is not so intense as to freeze the water; you must remember to take them out of the way of the draughts every evening. A friend of your mother's had charge of the hyacinths which always ornamented their drawing-rooms in early spring; one night she neglected taking them out of the balconies where she had placed them, and where they were always put when the sun shone; a sharp frost came on during the night, and the next morning, when poor Maria went into the drawing-room, what was her consternation when she saw every glass full of ice, and the greater part of them crashed. She burst into tears and ran to her favourite sister, who consoled her as well as she could (she was an able comforter too!), but they were afraid to meet their father in the drawing-room before dinner, as he, though a fond and good father, was apt to be a little harsh and sharp in his reprimands, and expected his children always to attend to their several duties and punctually discharge them, however trifling; accordingly, poor Maria felt she was in a great scrape, and trembled when at last obliged to make her appearance, on Henrietta's arm. Her father stood, as was his usual custom, with his back to the fire, and the tails of his coat under each arm. Maria sat down near the door. Presently Mr. Barrington looked round and missed the hyacinths. An inquiry and the dreaded explanation followed, and Maria's contrition, mixed with Henrietta's intercession, got her through better than she expected. The accident had the good effect of making Maria careful ever after."

"You would not have been so angry with me, would you, papa?" asked Ellen.

"My child, the habit of heedlessness is a very bad one, and needs correction, and Mr. Barrington was very right to try to correct it."

"Am I heedless, papa?" inquired Ellen.

"No, my dear, not generally."

"Am I, papa?" said Jessie.

"I am afraid I must say yes, Jessie, but you will improve, I hope, and not light candles from the hall lamp."

"Oh, no! that I will not again; how frightened I was when it shivered to pieces, and Dawson and Ralph came running to see what was the matter; but I did not forget anything, papa, I only threw the lighted paper into the lamp, and it cracked it."

"Well, you will be more careful in future, I hope, and not fling lighted paper anywhere; indeed, you should not have attempted to light your taper from the hall lamp. And now ring the bell that the things may be taken away; I have some letters to write, and I must go and look at the Alderney cow and her calf; it has come at a most unpropitious time, but fortunately there is plenty of ——"

"May I go and see the calf?" said Jessie, "and give the cow some beet-root, for there is plenty of that, I know; I saw Andrew stacking it away."

"No, Jessie, I like beet-root myself, and so does your mamma; so we will keep the beet-root for our table, and give Cowslip mangel-wurzel."

"But may I go and see the calf? I wonder what colour it is?"

"Not at present; I will take you some other time."

"Please, sir, Andrew says he doesn't think the stack 'll serve the winter," observed Ralph, stopping with the tray in his hand.

"Very well, then, I must contrive and get some more hay; but this weather, I take it, frightens Andrew."

"You can get plenty of hay, papa; don't you remember how much we saw in the fields in the summer?"

"Yes, but the farmers have a great many cows and horses to consume it, and are not fond of parting with their hay; however, it so happens that poor Wilkinson offered me some hay last week, as he has not things to eat it. I must try what I can do for that poor man; I am really sorry for him, with so large a family; I must set a subscription on foot."

"Yes, do, papa, and we will each give a shilling."

"Very well, my dears, I hope everybody will follow your example, and we shall even then do something; but I hope Colonel Delancey will give some hundreds."

"Pounds, papa."

"No, no, I mean shillings. I shall send Andrew, and have the hay brought in before the snow falls, and that will relieve all his apprehensions on that score; I shall then have to watch that he does not let Robin give the cows too much and waste it; even the best servants will do this when they fancy there is what they call 'plenty to go to.'"

"Look what icicles are hanging from the verandah," said Ellen to Jessie; "they glisten, too, like diamonds; one has just fallen on Rover's back, and made him jump. Poor Ro, he wondered what it was!"

"By the way," said Mr. Hamilton (noticing the beauty of the icicles), "I might as well have read you the description of the Empress of Russia's palace, which follows that of the water-mill in Cowper; I can some other time."

"Now, Jessie," said Ellen, "one run round the shrubbery, and then for our lessons."

They hastened to get ready, and, on going into the shrubbery, noticed the tameness of the blackbirds which hopped in and out under the laurels in their path; some fieldfares, too, were sitting disconsolate under the quickset hedge adjoining, and a flight of starlings close by them, with a magpie chattering in the old oak over their heads.

"Can you see another magpie, Ellen?" said Jessie, "because somebody says if there is only one magpie it is a sign of foul weather."

"No, I only see the one in the tree."

"Oh, it must snow though the sun shines now," said Jessie (who, like her papa, was a passionate admirer of birds, and already knew many of their habits), "the poor birds are so tame! Muff, go in, and do not scare them away."

"Poor Muff," said Ellen (whose great pet she was), "you must have a walk, and having had your breakfast, you will not want a bird. Look at the squirrel, Jessie, leaping about in the ash tree; it has wandered out of the park, and is frisking about here; but hark! there is the old clock chiming the hour; we must go in and see mamma."

CHAPTER II.

THEY found Mrs. Hamilton nearly dressed, and told her all the little occurrences of the morning; she listened to these

SIXTY YEARS SINCE.

trifles with the fondness of an affectionate mother, and to them she would give them their music lesson, when they had finished with papa. They were soon seated in the library at their own table with their books.

"I cannot write my exercise, Ellen, my fingers are cold," said Jessie, "and papa will be angry; I must go to the fire and warm them. Can you tell me, Ellen, what authors were most esteemed in Queen Anne's reign?"

"I am sure you may find Addison for one, and I think Steele for another," replied her sister; "and I think the greatest general was the Duke of Marlborough, once a Captain Churchill, whose descendants now own Bleinheim where Mrs. Templeman says there are such beautiful gardens and where those very small spaniels come from, not half as big as Rover, with very long ears."

"I am sorry Mrs. Templeman is gone from Ashdown, air you, Ellen?"

"Do not talk any more now, Jessie, but write, or you will not have finished; papa will be here presently." Mr. Hamilton came in a few minutes, and the lessons were well said, at the exercises tolerably done.

"And now we must go to mamma, and then, papa, will you walk with us?"

"Yes, my dears; come to me at one o'clock."

They were punctual to the time. "And now for poor Dame Egerton," said Ellen; "mamma has given me some flannel to take to her, and a pair of warm stockings."

"Shall we go through the park or by the heath?"

"I think we will go over the heath, and come back to the park."

They let themselves out at a pretty little wicket gate, which opened into a winding path leading through a grassy knoll to the heath; on one side was a large pond on which some wild ducks were seated by the edge on the ice; a gamekeeper was creeping up to get a shot at them, in which he succeeded, as they rose, killed two, much to the young ladies' discomfiture and Rover's delight, who bounded over the heath towards the spot, and came back looking as if he had shot the duck himself.

"There goes a woodcock out of the rushes," said Mr. Milton; "I wish I had a gun myself."

"Why, papa, you might shoot," said Ellen.

"Yes, my dear, but I have not attempted it since I came to Ashdown; in former times I shot a great deal with Mr. Seymour."

"Where is Mr. Seymour?"

"I wish I could tell you; he went abroad, and I have lost sight of him for many years."

"How beautiful those birches look with the hoarfrost on them! that poor little creeper cannot find many insects now; what a lively pretty little bird it is!" said Jessie.

"It is better off during snow than many other birds," observed her papa, "as the bark of trees still afford it eggs and larvæ, when the ground is shut to all intents and purposes to those who live on its fruits; the crows, the rooks, jackdaws, blackbirds, thrushes, and a variety of other birds, you see look very miserable and sit shivering about."

"I read something about it in the same book you read about the mill stream being frozen, papa; you found it for me."

"I know what you mean, Jessie; it is Cowper who says,

"How find the myriads that, in summer, cheer
The hills and valleys with their ceaseless songs,
Due sustenance, or where subsist they now?
Earth yields them nought; the imprisoned worm is safe
Beneath the frozen clod; all seeds of herbs
Lie covered close; and berry-bearing thorns,
That feed the thrush (whatever some suppose)
Afford the smaller minstrels no supply.
The long-protracted rigour of the year
Thins all their numerous flocks. In chinks and holes
Ten thousand seek an unmolested end,
As instinct prompts; self buried ere they die.
The very rooks and daws forsake the fields,
Where neither grub, nor root, nor earth-nut, now
Repays their labour more," etc.

"The little Egertons are sliding on the pool," said Ellen; "there is Ruth, too, and little Amy trying to slide."

Ruth ran to the gate to open it when she saw the party of "gentlefolks," and they went through a neat garden into a *cottage as neat; swept, and sanded*: by the side of the peat fire sat a poor woman, who rose and held by her chair whilst *urteseying to Mr. Hamilton*, who told her he was glad to see "well enough to come down-stairs again.

"Blessed be God for his mercy in raising me up, sir. I hope you and madam and the young ladies will be rewarded for all your kindnesses; I think on it by day and by night, though I sleeps now comfortable, and Stephen wakes mostly first. Ah! how many's the morn I ha' waked him to get up to kindle the fire and go to work; won't you be pleased to sit near the fire, miss, it's main cold?"

"Thank you, dame, I do very well; mamma has sent you some flannel and warm stockings."

"Bless her goodness again and again; I sweeped the room mysel' this morning, and let Ruth go out a bit; poor thing, she have had a hard time of it."

"Ruth, you were glad to be serviceable to your mother, were you not?" said Mr. Hamilton to Ruth, who stood by the door curtseying, with her eyes modestly fixed on the ground, not staring, as rude children do, at the young ladies.

"Yes, sir," replied Ruth, looking up.

"I know you will be a good girl, and teach Amy to be good too," said Mr. Hamilton; "and can you eat now, my good woman?"

"Oh yes, sir, and Mrs. Jenkins do send me a nice bit now and tan, and it relisses now."

"Very good, and you have indeed reason to be thankful; that your recovery has been owing to the Power that alone can raise up, you are so well aware of, that I need not say anything on that subject. I hope you will come to church as soon as you can walk so far; but do not try before you feel you are strong enough. I will come and read to you. I suppose Ruth has read some of the Bible to you this morning?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, she read to me from Isaiah about Hezekias and his getting well of his sickness."

"Very well, take care you do not get cold. Good-bye."

"Oh dearee me, sir, how is Madam Hamilton?"

"She is better, and perhaps may come and see you in the spring."

"What is the reason that cottagers' cats seldom have a nice tail, and look starved?" said Ellen, as poor puss came by them in the path.

"I suppose they burn their tails sitting too near the peat fire, tempted by the warm hearth, and are not over fed Ellen. I am afraid Muff does not catch so many mice as Dar Egerton's cat."

"Indeed, papa, she catches one almost every day, cook says, under the flour tub; she sits and watches them and seizes them in a moment; I am glad the weather makes her sleepy, she would catch the poor robins else."

"There goes the coach, papa, by the lodge; how gay it looks across the dark heath!"

"It will be almost hidden by turkeys next week going up for Christmas fare, Jessie. By the way, Ellen, do you know if your mamma has bespoken one?"

"No, papa."

"If not, we will go to-morrow to Farmer Morrison's and order one."

"I like to go to the Down Farm," said both the children. "What a large herd of deer under that old oak amongst the fern! some fawn-coloured, some mottled, some white; now they gallop away so fleetly and have disturbed a pheasant. See, papa."

"Yes, I saw him; a pheasant makes a poor appearance on the wing, a blackcock flies better, and looks then the nobler bird of the two. We must walk fast up this old avenue, which begins to want clearing in many parts of the bush and underwood."

"But oh, papa, how sweetly the nightingales sing here in the spring! mamma was well enough to walk here some evenings, and they were delightful."

"I dare say, but there is plenty of covert for them all over the park, and I should like to have this noble avenue in order. See, there is a deer looking through the beechwood, I see his antlers above the yellow leaves, and now away he bounds! Did you ever notice, my dears, that the leaves of beeches remain longer on the trees than any others? In fact, they do not fall off the young beech till the fresh ones come; for this reason some people prefer a beech hedge, it affords so good a shelter."

"I hear Stephen's axe ringing in the woods," said Ellen; "what trees is he cutting down, papa?"

"Probably ash, or it may be elm."

"I like the ash; it is so graceful with its light foliage."

"Yes, my dear, it is; but it is in leaf only five months in the year; it does not venture to unfold its buds till May: you may have noticed them with their dark brown sheaths swelling in April. There is an old saying, "If the ash leaves are seen before

the oak leaves it will be a bad summer ;" but it is a beautiful tree, and its stem when grown old and covered with ivy in the banks of the deep lanes forms a picture in itself. I have often stopped to admire its effect with the ferns, as you sometimes see them waving gracefully round its roots, which twist about fantastically in every direction, and run to great lengths naked along the banks like grey serpents writhed here and there. Ah, an old pollard, specially an ash pollard, is a glorious thing ! and I remember an old oak one on whose twisted roots I have often sat and even swung."

"There is Fowdy in the porch mewing to be let in ; so we are just in time to go in with her," said Jessie, ringing the bell.

The door was opened by a tidy girl in a check apron and short-sleeved stuff gown.

"Mrs. Meredith is not at dinner ?" asked Mr. Hamilton.

"No, sir. Please to walk in," said Phœbe, ushering them along a long passage into a pleasant cheerful parlour at the end, where, knitting a stocking, sat Mrs. Meredith, who got up with a low curtsey to receive her visitors.

"I am afraid you and the young ladies find it very cold this frosty morning."

"Not in your room, which is a picture of warmth and comfort ! Do not go to that closet, Mrs. Meredith, we cannot eat any cake to-day, or stay ten minutes with you ; we dine, as you know, on Mrs. Hamilton's account, at three o'clock, and it is nearly two now ; we merely looked in on you to say how do you do."

"I am sorry you will not let the young ladies taste the best cake I ever made, sir ; but I hope they will come some morning again this week before it gets stale. I am glad to hear Mrs. Hamilton can dine down-stairs again," said Mrs. Meredith, resuming her knitting. "Perhaps, sir, you would like a little ratafia ?"

"Not a drop ; you are a true housekeeper in this respect, you always have plenty of good things."

"Ay, but the worst of it is, there is nobody to enjoy them ; if I could but see this fine old place inhabited again, how happy it would make me ! about this time, when everybody else is rejoicing, I am always most melancholy, because there is nobody here to see the poor people made happy by the bounty bestowed."

"We must take the evil with the good; you should be thankful that you live with so bountiful a master, who allows you to distribute so much, and make so many comfortable; how much worse it would have been had you served a different sort of family."

"Yes, sir, you are in the right, I often think so myself; but it would do me good to see a master and mistress here, to see my lord and my lady, and have young gentlemen and ladies running about, and coming to me and saying, Mrs. Meredith, I want this; Mrs. Meredith, I want that. Ah! Miss Hamilton, you have got Fowdy in your lap, I see."

"Yes, she is going to sleep; look, papa."

"Well now, if you had your wish, perhaps there might be dogs that would torment Fowdy, and that you would not like, Mrs. Meredith."

"Ah, sir, you always find something to console one, even in trifles."

"I always think this is such a pretty little window," said Jessie, "opening out on these sweet flowers in this pretty little garden, and looking on the terrace, and the park below that; but the poor flowers are all gone now, even the beautiful white stocks hang their heads."

"Yes, Miss Jessie, they are gone, but I sent a large bunch of them which I gathered yesterday up to the parsonage, by Roger, this morning, and they still smell sweet. Dear me, I must hang the curtain over Tiny, he sings so loud."

"No, we must go, and Tiny may sing. I have heard canaries always sing more at Christmas than at any other time. Come, Ellen, put down Fowdy and bid Mrs. Meredith good-bye, I smell her dinner. Do not call Phœbe or come yourself, we can let ourselves out."

"We must go the shortest way home, my loves, if the grass is not wet; and here is Rover tired of waiting for us."

"How pretty these hawthorn bushes are, covered with moss," said Ellen; "and this fine moss which falls from the larches is still prettier. I should like to gather some for mamma, if I had time."

"But you have not, my dear, and you can come at any other time to gather moss, there is always plenty, and further down on the side of the park near the heath, there are many beautiful varieties. Have you never observed them?"

"No, papa, only the little grey cups, which look like wine
lasses tipped with crimson."

"Well, some day we will go moss gathering, and we
shall get many different kinds, in all of which there is some-
thing to admire."

"Oh, what a large herd of deer Rover is chasing!"

"Come here, Rover," said Mr. Hamilton, "we must not
ake him through the park if he runs after the deer; and now,
girls, jump over the stile. I once knew a poor woman who
umped over it much quicker than you do, but terror gave
wings to her."

"Had she really wings, papa, because she was frightened,
and why was she frightened?"

"No, I do not mean that she really became possessed of
wings, how silly of you to imagine such a thing! it is a figure
of speech. Why she was frightened is easily told; she was
taking home a small basket with some linen she had been wash-
ing for some ladies who employed her, and which she carried
under one arm, her baby, an infant of about eight months
old, was on the other; she walked very fast through this part
of the park, knowing there was a fierce bull often feeding
there, of which complaints had often been made to the steward,
who treated them as nonsense; just as she reached the old
chestnut trees on the right there she heard the roar of the
bull, and turning her head round, saw him pawing the earth
and tossing his head in a threatening manner; she set off and
ran, and heard the bull pursuing her, bellowing loudly. She
remembers reaching the high stile before us, but nothing
farther, till she found herself lying on the ground, and on
opening her eyes, and raising herself up, she saw her baby in
the ditch on its face, and the linen scattered about on the
grass. She got up and ran to the child, who was not hurt, she
then fell on her knees and thanked God, and then picking up
her linen, which, as the grass was dry, was not soiled, she
carried it to the ladies for whom she had been washing it;
they treated her very kindly, and gave her something to com-
fort her and allay her agitation, and after resting till she was
quite composed, she walked back to her cottage, a servant
going with her. You may be certain she did not venture
through the park on her return."

"Poor woman, how sadly frightened she must have been

"No, no, I mean shillings. I shall send Andrew, and have the hay brought in before the snow falls, and that will relieve all his apprehensions on that score; I shall then have to watch that he does not let Robin give the cows too much and waste it; even the best servants will do this when they fancy there is what they call 'plenty to go to.'"

"Look what icicles are hanging from the verandah," said Ellen to Jessie; "they glisten, too, like diamonds; one has just fallen on Rover's back, and made him jump. Poor Ro, he wondered what it was!"

"By the way," said Mr. Hamilton (noticing the beauty of the icicles), "I might as well have read you the description of the Empress of Russia's palace, which follows that of the water-mill in Cowper; I can some other time."

"Now, Jessie," said Ellen, "one run round the shrubbery, and then for our lessons."

They hastened to get ready, and, on going into the shrubbery, noticed the tameness of the blackbirds which hopped in and out under the laurels in their path; some fieldfares, too, were sitting disconsolate under the quickset hedge adjoining, and a flight of starlings close by them, with a magpie chattering in the old oak over their heads.

"Can you see another magpie, Ellen?" said Jessie, "because somebody says if there is only one magpie it is a sign of foul weather."

"No, I only see the one in the tree."

"Oh, it must snow though the sun shines now," said Jessie (who, like her papa, was a passionate admirer of birds, and already knew many of their habits), "the poor birds are so tame! Muff, go in, and do not scare them away."

"Poor Muff," said Ellen (whose great pet she was), "you must have a walk, and having had your breakfast, you will not want a bird. Look at the squirrel, Jessie, leaping about in the ash tree; it has wandered out of the park, and is frisking about here; but hark! there is the old clock chiming the hour; we must go in and see mamma."

CHAPTER II.

THEY found Mrs. Hamilton nearly dressed, and told her all the little occurrences of the morning; she listened to these

trifles with the fondness of an affectionate mother, and told them she would give them their music lesson, when they had finished with papa. They were soon seated in the library at their own table with their books.

"I cannot write my exercise, Ellen, my fingers are so cold," said Jessie, "and papa will be angry; I must go to the fire and warm them. Can you tell me, Ellen, what authors were most esteemed in Queen Anne's reign?"

"I am sure you may find Addison for one, and I think Steele for another," replied her sister; "and I think the greatest general was the Duke of Marlborough, once plain Ensign Churchill, whose descendants now own Bleinheim, where Mrs. Templeman says there are such beautiful gardens, and where those very small spaniels come from, not half so big as Rover, with very long ears."

"I am sorry Mrs. Templeman is gone from Ashdown, ain't you, Ellen?"

"Do not talk any more now, Jessie, but write, or you will not have finished; papa will be here presently." Mr. Hamilton came in a few minutes, and the lessons were well said, and the exercises tolerably done.

"And now we must go to mamma, and then, papa, will you walk with us?"

"Yes, my dears; come to me at one o'clock."

They were punctual to the time. "And now for poor dame Egerton," said Ellen; "mamma has given me some flannel to take to her, and a pair of warm stockings."

"Shall we go through the park or by the heath?"

"I think we will go over the heath, and come back by the park."

They let themselves out at a pretty little wicket gate, which opened into a winding path leading through a grassy knoll to the heath; on one side was a large pond on which some wild ducks were seated by the edge on the ice; a gamekeeper was creeping up to get a shot at them, in which he succeeded, and as they rose, killed two, much to the young ladies' discomfiture and Rover's delight, who bounded over the heath towards the spot, and came back looking as if he had shot the ducks himself.

"There goes a woodcock out of the rushes," said Mr. Hamilton; "I wish I had a gun myself."

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the weather was severe, but she was found on a bank which formed a path above the deep road where her little pony stood grazing; a labouring man going to his work found her. She was quite dead, and taken to the little public-house in the village: as she had not complained of any previous illness it is probable she died of apoplexy."

"What is that, mamma?"

"A fit caused by the brain being affected; she was a remarkably quiet inoffensive woman, of a tall spare figure and much regretted. I have some lines which I can show you, that were written by a lady who lived in her neighbourhood: I will get them when I go upstairs."

"Can I fetch them, mamma?" asked Jessie.

"No, my dear, you must wait patiently till I go upstairs."

"I can see some stars, and the ground begins to glisten, I think."

"It is a thought, Jessie," said her father, "for I see some snow now falling against the window, and the glass has not risen yet; it was getting up a little, but has dropped again, which is a sure sign of a heavy fall if wind does not come, and it is so still, everything seems hushed abroad. I fear we must not calculate on getting to Down Farm to-morrow; I fancied I heard the old clock at the park strike five just now, and the wind is consequently south-east."

"Well, we can go when it is fine," said Jessie; "I hear the gate bell ring. Bradley is come with the paper, and perhaps letters."

"Yes," said Ellen, "here comes Ralph."

"Am I to bring the lamp, sir?" asked Ralph, giving the paper and letters to his master.

"No, not yet," said his master.

"Dear papa, don't you want to read your letters?" asked both his children.

"No, my dears, not particularly; I see by the firelight they are both bills, and will keep till tea-time, and you know how much your mother and I enjoy this sort of 'parlour twilight,' as Cowper calls it."

"Which Mr. Elphinstone dislikes so much," said Ellen; "*he said, you know, papa, it was detestable.*"

"*Mr. Elphinstone is a good-natured man, Ellen, but I do*

not agree with him on many points, and in this we totally differ ; there is your mother, too, thinks with me, so make yourself happy till tea-time."

"Oh, yes, papa, I am not going to be unhappy ; I did wish to find a story I am reading, but I can wait till after tea."

"What story is it that interests you so much ?" asked her other.

"'Lazy Lawrence,' mamma ; I have just read to where Jem has begun to make a mat."

"It is a very pretty story," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"I like it almost as well as 'Simple Susan,' mamma, but not quite."

"How this sort of evening reminds me of Cowper's delightful pictures of one so spent," said Mr. Hamilton ; "how entirely he entered into it, and how beautifully he has described it in his 'Task.' I confess to liking a candle-light dinner, but it does not compensate for the many pleasures which early hours give where you can enjoy them in the country as we do. I can repeat the passage to you, my dears; you are old enough to understand its beauty :—

"Nor undelightful is an hour to me
 So spent in parlour twilight ; such a gloom
 Suits well the thoughtful or unthinking mind ;
 The mind contemplative, with some new theme
 Pregnant, or indispos'd alike to all.
 Laugh ye, who boast your more mercurial pow'rs
 That never feel a stupor, know no pause,
 Nor need one ; I am conscious, and confess
 Fearless a soul that does not always think.
 Me oft has fancy, ludicrous and wild,
 Sooth'd with a waking dream of houses, tow'rs,
 Trees, churches, and strange visages, express'd
 In the red cinders, while with poring eye
 I gaz'd, myself creating what I saw ;
 Nor less amused have I quiescent watch'd
 The sooty films that play upon the bars
 Pendulous, and foreboding in the view
 Of superstition, prophesying still,
 Though still deceiv'd some stranger's near approach.
 'Tis thus the understanding takes repose,
 In indolent vacuity of thought,
 And sleeps and is refresh'd. Meanwhile the face
 Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
 Of deep deliberation, as the man

Were task'd to his full strength, absorb'd and lost.
 Thus oft, reclin'd at ease, I lose an hour
 At evening, till at length the freezing blast,
 That sweep'st the bolted shutters, summons home
 The recollect'd powers, and snapping short
 The glassy threads with which the fancy weaves
 Her brittle toils, restores me to myself.
 How calm is my recess, and how the frost
 Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear
 The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within.
 I saw the woods and fields, at close of day,
 A variegated show; the meadows green,
 Though faded; and the lands, where lately wav'd
 The golden harvest, of a mellow brown,
 Upturn'd so lately by the forceful share.
 I saw far off the weedy fallows smile
 With verdure not unprofitable, graz'd
 By flocks, fast feeding and selecting each
 His fav'rite herb; while all the leafless groves
 That skirt th' horizon, wore a sable hue,
 Scarce notic'd in the kindred dusk of eve.' "

"I like those lines very much, papa, but did you see any sheep feeding fast this evening, or notice that the groves looked dark?"

"We came in too early, and I have not been out since dinner, but I have often noticed the appearances Cowper describes, and we may go on and say with him, 'To-morrow brings a change, a total change,' for I certainly think the ground will be covered with snow."

"I can see a stranger on the third bar, now, papa," said Jessie.

"Yes, but you must understand Cowper says 'foreboding in the view of superstition;' it is not likely any stranger will come."

"Oh, but it is good fun to watch it and see, for Nurse Barnes saw just a——; what is it, papa?"

"Film."

"Saw just such a film; and don't you remember, Ellen, she clapped her hands to see if it went in or flew off the bar, because if it went into the fire the stranger would come in, and if it flew away, the stranger would not come in; so Ellen, let us just try that film."

The experiment was made and the imaginary strange

vanished. Mr. Hamilton smiled, and at that moment in came Ralph with the lamp.

CHAPTER III.

"I WILL look at these bills before I read the paper," said Mr. Hamilton. "Then give it to me; I sometimes find something to interest me, and here it is; George Montgomery has an appointment, I see, which I am very glad of."

"To what ship?"

"To the *Thunderer*, which is ordered to the West Indies; poor fellow, I hope he will escape the yellow fever; he will, doubtless, come and see us before he goes."

"How I should like to see a ship, mamma!"

"This ship! I fear my child there is little probability of that, as, if I should get quite well, we could not go to Portsmouth at this time of the year."

"Still, sometime or other, I do hope I may see the sea and a ship, a man of war."

"Perhaps your cousin Octavius may be captain of one some day or other, and then you shall go and see his."

"Oh, thank you, papa."

"My dear, what bad tea you have given me! you should always attend to what you are about, be it what it may. Little girls are very apt to say, 'I was thinking of this,' or, 'I was thinking of that,' when they are heedless, but that is no excuse; you should early acquire the habit of doing well whatever you do, and giving your whole attention to whatever you may be engaged in: habits formed at your age remain with us all our lives. I remember some young men with whom I was at college, who had been allowed when boys to loll about on chairs and tables, and the consequence was, they still lounged about, and generally broke all their chairs and tables; and to one or two who were poor, though gentlemen, it was a serious expense, and there were some Oxford ladies who dreaded inviting them to their houses because they valued their chairs, and it happened to be at houses where they wished particularly to be invited. I have heard these ladies say, 'I shall have all my chairs broken, if I ask them! Tiresome boys! Yet they ~~used~~ and wished to have them; but do not tell Mr. Elfriston this, Jessie, for he happened to be one, & always seems trying if he can break a chair by leaning

whole weight against the back of one, and putting his feet up on another. I do not like to see young people precise and formal, but I dislike to see them always lounging about as many of the present day accustom themselves to."

When tea was over Ellen and Jessie got their books and looked for half an hour over the lessons they were to say the following morning; they then played a duet to their father, who was fond of music, and Ellen sang "Auld Robin Gray" to his accompaniment on the flute, and another simple ballad or two; after this the chessboard came forth and she sat down with her papa to play chess, Jessie looking over them.

"Check, papa."

"You should not give useless checks, my love, I can put my king out of check with advantage."

"I do not know how it is, papa; I like to say check."

"Well, if it pleases you; but you will never improve if you do not attend to what I say."

"Yes, I will try, papa, for I long to play at chess to beat Miss Tomlinson, who fancies she can play so well."

"That is a bad motive for wishing to learn chess, Ellen."

"Oh, but it is only one reason, for I shall like it very much I am sure, papa."

"Now be silent then, and attend to your game."

"Which has beaten?" said Jessie, as Ellen rose to put away the board.

"Oh, papa, besides I do not feel that I have a chance of really beating yet; I could not beat anybody, much less papa."

"Is your work ready?" asked Mr. Hamilton; "it is eight o'clock, and here is Selborne."

"We have got our work," said Mrs. Hamilton, "so you may begin if you please."

Mr. Hamilton read aloud to them till nine, when the prayer bell was always rung; soon after which Ellen and Jessie went to bed.

"I do not like getting into the cold bed to-night," said Jessie, "but I am very sleepy; so good night, Ellen."

"Can it be a quarter to seven, Dawson?" said Ellen, opening her eyes the following morning; "why how dark it is!"

"Very dark, Miss Hamilton, for all the snow; but it keeps snowing, and is very cloudy."

"Come Jessie, get up," said Ellen, "or you will not be ressed."

"Why we cannot walk this morning if it snows."

"Yes, we can, under the verandah to the west; I shall go and try it when I am ready."

"It strikes seven now; in ten minutes may I ring for Dawson to brush my hair?"

"Yes," said Jessie, "I have been very quick; the water was too cold to dawdle."

"Now, Dawson, you must not be long this morning, or I shall be frozen; how cold your hands are!"

"I am just come from your mamma's fire too, Miss Jessie; went into her dressing-room to work a little that my hands might be warm before I came here."

"Is it a deep snow?"

"Yes, Miss Hamilton; poor Bradley said last night he had not a track to go by when he was here, and he wished he might find his way home; he had a letter to carry to Farmer Ellington's, which was very unlucky, and so seldom as any of those people have a letter."

"It was indeed," said Ellen; "he would have to cross Broad Moor. Now, Jessie, are you ready?"

"Quite, except my gloves; where can I have put them to! I must put on these for the present."

"I wish you would mind what mamma says about putting our things in the proper place; I am careless sometimes, but my little sister is worse."

They went downstairs, and into the verandah, where they were completely sheltered from the snow, which fell thick and fast around.

"We cannot even see across the lawn, Ellen, but I never see snow as Sturm says you do, in the form of little stars; it seems to me all kinds of shapes of no figure at all."

"I believe on the mountains in Wales it falls in the form Sturm describes; at least, Mrs. Somerville, who lived some years in Merionethshire, told me she had noticed it falling in stars at the top of the mountain, when below its shape was irregular; and I suppose in Germany, where you know Sturm lived, it is colder, and falls in stars."

The sisters walked for half an hour, and then went ^{armed} by the exercise. When their papa came down

inquired if they had been out, and was pleased to hear they had been walking.

" You will not lose this early habit, my dears, and it will give you many pleasures, as I gladly see in both of you a taste for the beauties of nature ; we should consider this as a blessing, for I really think it is born with us, and when cultivated never leaves us. I have seen many people stare with astonishment on an object being pointed out to them which was beautiful to a lover of nature : for instance, a mossy bank, sheep feeding in a dingle, or, what to me is what I best like to look on, the cows coming up to be milked ; all these, and many other things, people who have no taste for them regard as utterly beneath their notice, or as things which tire rather than amuse them ; I trust to seeing my children take delight in all these simple pleasures which offer themselves to us on every side, and are to be prized the more on this very account. It is too cold for mamma to venture down this morning to breakfast, as she had intended, and I fear all chance of our walk to Down Farm must be given up for the present ; we must wait till the snow is frozen or has disappeared."

" What is to be done about the turkey, papa ? "

" I will write a note, and send it by the postman this evening."

" If you please, sir," said Ralph, coming in whilst they were at breakfast, " will you let Andrew go and help Farmer Wellclose ? some sheep of his'n are, he is afraid, buried in a snow-drift ; they're trying to dig them out."

" By all means, and let Roger go too, directly."

" I hope they will be got out, papa," said his children.

" I hope so, too, my dears. I remember a woman being buried in the snow for some days, who was dug out alive ; her name was Elizabeth Woodcock. I know she lived in Cambridgeshire, I have the account somewhere, and will show it you ; the wind blows fiercely now from the north-east, and will occasion the snow to drift in many places."

" Mamma's mound, on the lawn, looks like a twelfth cake," said Jessie ; " and oh ! papa, how beautiful the trees are, all covered with snow ! but the wind is stripping them of their plumes."

" Now, my dears, go and walk in the verandah."

"I shall skip, I think," said Jessie, taking her skipping-rope, "or shall we trundle our hoops?"

"We will both skip; there is not room for us to use our hoops in the verandah. I shall be glad when the walks are swept; and look, here comes Andrew with his broom; so I hope the sheep are all safe."

On inquiry, this was found to be the case, and the young ladies listened with interest to Andrew's lengthened account of how they were got out of the snow, and how one hadumbled into the brook, and was a'most, not quite, dead, etc., etc.; and how they went to Farmer Wellclose's, and had some ale. "It freezes now, Miss," added Andrew, "and if we doesn't sweep the snow off the walks, we shan't be able to do it at all."

"I will help you," said Jessie, seizing a broom, and sweeping away with all her might.

"Oh, Miss! you maunt, you're sweeping the gravel up, and that 'ill never do."

"Very well, Andrew; you and Roger may sweep."

"I am glad it freezes, we shall have a nice walk to church to-morrow," said Ellen.

"I am always glad when Saturday comes," said Jessie, because that is our own day."

Saturday quickly passed, and Sunday's sun rose bright and unclouded, shining on the branches of palms and plumes of feathers, intermixed with little stars, which the young ladies remarked were traced on the windows.

"You know what causes that beautiful tracery?" said their papa.

"Yes, papa; it is the warm air escaping. We read of it in Sturm."

"You must not set the hyacinths in the window to-day, it is too cold, the thermometer is at the freezing point. There to the little girls to the vestry-room, where I dare say Mrs. Stevenson has got a blazing fire."

"You have but half an hour, my dears. Have you learned your verses from St. John?"

The verses were well said, and Ellen and Jessie ready to talk with their papa to the room, where they found many little rosy faces, all waiting to be questioned by Mr. Hamilton, to read to the Miss Hamiltons, after which Mr. Hamil-

talked to them, and pointed out their duties in a way which they could understand, and many kind inquiries were made into the health and welfare of the parents.

"I am glad to see you here again, Ruth," said Ellen, "and is your mother as well as when we saw her?"

"Better, Miss, thank you; but she was afraid to come to church, 'cause it was so cold, and she hopes his reverence won't be angry."

"Not at all; I do not desire that anything should be done to hurt the health; I am only angry when anybody tells me they cannot come to church because of their clothes! A clean gown can always be had by those in health, and if it be patched so much the better. God does not look at our outsides, but at the inside; God notices the meek and quiet spirit, and the desire to serve Him by obeying his commands, and going to his house to pray to and serve Him; you must always remember this. You look very well, Mrs. Stevenson, and you have got, as I said you would have, a nice fire, and we shall all go warm into church, and pray fervently, I trust, to the God who gives us all things to enjoy. I hope the girls and Billy, and Neddy Jones, will sing to-day."

"I have been making them practise the morning hymn for half an hour, sir, and I think they sing very prettily."

"Benson was here, of course, and Towers, and the other singers?"

"Yes, sir; and I told them as you bid me, not to repeat the lines over and over again, in the psalms they sung, and they said your reverence knew all about it."

"Yes, I have given them instructions on that point. I do not like to hear them going over and over again with a line, till the people are tired, and lose all sense of devotion, the devotion which should accompany every exercise in church: we should sing with devotion as well as read and pray with it."

"There is the bell, ting-tong, papa," said Jessie.

"Yes, my dear, I am going."

"There goes Brown, with your surplice and gown."

As soon as they had entered the church, and said their prayers, the morning hymn was even beautifully sung, and Mr. Hamilton read the service and preached impressively.

On their return they found Mrs. Hamilton downstairs, and at an early hour (their wont on Sundays) went to dinner.

"I wish mamma, you were well enough to go to church with us this afternoon, it is such a hard frost, and such nice walking."

"I should be thankful to do so, my dears, but I must for the present read the service at home to old Alice."

Old Alice, as she was lame, and could not walk so far always, came to stay at the rectory, the church being further for her to reach. She had been a valuable servant to Mrs. Hamilton's mother, and was much respected by the family.

When they returned from evening service, the sun had set, and the light began to fade, and the children noticed the evening star glowing in the west.

"I have something to tell you, I have learned from Alice," said Mrs. Hamilton. "Last night, Robert Owen's house took fire, and was nearly burnt down, he is gone with his wife and children to his mother's at Grasslands, and was forced to drive his cattle there."

"I wonder I did not hear of this from some one or other, to-day," said Mr. Hamilton, "but it was so extremely cold, the people dispersed immediately, and we walked home as quickly as we could; still, I wonder the children did not tell us. I am sorry for poor Owen, and must see what can be done for him."

"Oh! Alice, aren't you cold?" said the girls, running to her.

"No, my dears, not by this nice fire; I was rather cold this morning before I came up here."

CHAPTER IV.

"THERE is something for you to see this morning," said Mr. Hamilton at breakfast the next morning; "the lake is frozen, and Mr. Elphinstone and Colonel De Lancey are going there to skate. I shall take my skates, and you and Jessie, Ellen, may go with me; you were very little girls when you saw skating last."

"Oh! thank you, papa; how we shall enjoy it, and perhaps we can slide too!"

"Not on the lake, that would interrupt the skating, a safe range is required; but you may go and slide on the

pond here, for I have ascertained that it will bear, and is safe."

Away flew the children, and their rosy cheeks, and many a laugh, announced how much they enjoyed their exercise. Their father had himself taught them to slide, and now joined in their recreation till they went in to lessons, after which they set off for the lake.

"We have no occasion to go in the beaten track, papa," said Jessie, "for the snow is firm everywhere."

"It may be treacherous, Jessie, and you had better not trust it too far, on the common, where there are pits; when we reach the park, you can go wherever you like, as far as the underwood will let you, as on the side where the lake is the ground is tolerably level after you have passed the birches."

They soon reached the park, and Ellen and Jessie noticed the deer scraping the snow away, in hopes of finding food.

"What do they do, papa," asked they, "for something to eat?"

"Campbell feeds them with hay; it is taken to different parts of the park for them. I can see a fur cap through the birches; we are not far from the lake. Now, which is it, Colonel De Lancey or Mr. Elphinstone?"

"Oh, Colonel De Lancey; he is much the tallest. There is somebody else on the ice, papa; it is Lord Mortimer. How nice he looks, and how well he skates! See, he is pulling off his cap and bowing to us, and now he waves it in the air; why he has grown almost as tall as his uncle."

"How d'ye do, Colonel De Lancey? I know you cannot stop. I am going to put on my skates and join you; I do not know any sport I enjoy more. Now, Elphinstone, I shall catch you, pass you presently. Girls, you must not stand still, you had better walk backwards and forwards quickly, and you will see your father cut the figure of eight on the ice."

"A reel, a reel," shouted Mr. Elphinstone.

"With all my heart;" and to the amusement of Ellen and Jessie, the skaters did a reel admirably. They walked and stood by turns, looking at them, and when they were tired walked to the castle to sit with Mrs. Meredith, till their father should join them.

"Oh, young ladies! your shoes must be wet."

"Indeed they are not, for we have got our snow shoes

over them, which we will take off, please, whilst we stay with you."

"Oh! to be sure, to see what inventions there are now! People had not such things in my young days."

"Why don't you have some, Mrs. Meredith? you can get them at Ripplewell."

"I do not go out, you know, Miss Hamilton, except to church, so they would be of little use to me."

"Now, Mrs. Meredith, will you let us go into the picture-gallery, whilst you dine? for here comes Phœbe to lay your cloth."

"To be sure you shall."

"I will reach you the bunch of keys," said Ellen, taking the heavy bunch off the peg, on which the keys were always deposited. "How heavy they are! you do not wear them at your girdle as the old housekeepers used to do."

"No; but I should, if this was a regular show-place, and it deserves to be more than many that are so: few can boast of such a saloon and such a staircase as ours, with such a gallery of pictures into the bargain. Well, this lock does not turn very easy. Ah! that will do; now shall we go round by the chapel, or up the staircase, young ladies?"

"Up the staircase, for it is so cold."

"Ah! the chapel never was cold, when my old lord lived here, and there was service twice a-day; but I fear I shall never see these days again."

"Oh! how beautiful the staircase looks, with the sun shining through the painted window on its carved rails, and these beautifully carved pillars; but papa says he thinks they are too massive—that was his word. We have never yet got to the end of the gallery, I wonder if we shall to-day."

"The reason is, that Mrs. Meredith has always something to tell us about the pictures."

"There is Phœbe come to tell me my dinner is ready; now, young ladies, I have opened the gallery, and when I have dined, I will come back to you, if you are not tired before." So saying, away went Mrs. Meredith; Phœbe venturing to put in her head to peep round at the magnificence which prevailed here, in the gorgeous colouring of the pictures of the lords and ladies.

Ellen and Jessie looked at, and made their own observa-

tions on the paintings ; those of the old school did not attract much of their attention. With the cartoons which hung in that part of the gallery leading to the chapel they were familiar. St. Paul, preaching at Athens, they used, when little girls, to compare to their father, and Jessie recalled it to Ellen's recollection, as she opened the door of the chapel and looked in.

"I should like to see papa preaching from the pulpit in the chapel," said Ellen ; "I wonder if he ever will!"

"Now, do let us get into the long gallery, or we shall never get to the end," said Jessie, who soon after, from one of the compartments of the windows discovered the skaters, and called her sister to come and look at them ; they were, however, visible only now and then ; but they stood so long watching for a glimpse, that Mrs. Meredith made her appearance in the gallery ere the children were aware of her approach.

"Well, Miss Hamilton, why you have not got to the end of the gallery yet?"

"No, we have been watching papa, and the gentlemen skating, and I am afraid papa is coming, as I see him on the edge of the lake ; so we shall not get to the end of the gallery this morning, as it is no use to look at the pictures in a hurry, and I want to know the names of every portrait. Just tell me who this is," looking at one in a full blue uniform.

"That is Admiral Seymour, and he has lost some of his colour, though he has not been painted such a number of years ; he was my lady's father."

"Seymour is the name of papa's old friend," said Ellen. "Oh, here is papa. Do come and look at Admiral Seymour, and tell us if he is like your Mr. Seymour."

"I should think there might be some resemblance, my dear, as he happened to be his father."

"Why then he was brother to the lady who lived here, papa, dear ; how delightful to have the run, as Hugh de Clifford calls it, of such a dear old place!"

"I do not believe he was ever here, he went abroad before his sister married ; she was very lovely."

"Where is her picture ? do show it to us ; no, let us try and find it out."

"My dears, you will not have time, we must go directly,

nd some other morning you can come and look for it with
rs. Meredith, who, I know, is always pleased to be in this
ace amongst her old friends."

"Ah, sir! but it is a melancholy pleasure, for some I never
m see again; and it is a chance if I do any of them, I think
metimes."

"But that is when you are melancholy, and my maxim is
ways to look on the bright side of things and cherish hope,
hich being implanted in our nature by a bountiful Creator,
e ought never to lose sight of. I cannot help thinking you
ill yet see many of your old friends, and this fine old place
live with those you love."

"I pray it may be so, sir; but you do not look very lively
ourself."

"Why I was thinking of past times and a very old friend;
ut we must hasten away, so good-bye. Oh, I told Lord
fortimer that Oldwood would, I thought, go to shoot rabbits
ith him when the snow goes; you may just mention it to
im when you see him."

On getting to the parsonage they found it was dinner-time,
nd Mrs. Hamilton wondering what had become of them.
Muff had deposited a chaffinch at the parlour door, much to
he chagrin of Jessie, who would have had her beaten for killing
t, had not her papa convinced her that it would be quite as
unreasonable, as she fancied Muff faulty, to have her punished.

"Bradley is late with the letters to-day," observed Mr.
Hamilton, as the time for their delivery passed; "perhaps
the mail is not come in. Colonel De Lancey told me there
had been a very heavy fall of snow in the south; this is just
the weather I enjoy before Christmas, it is so seasonable."

"I hope the roads will not be blocked up and prevent
Fanny's coming; Hugh will be so disappointed," observed
Mrs. Hamilton.

"There is a letter from her, my dear," said Mr. Hamilton,
taking it from Ralph, who came in with the letter-bag in his
hands; "I will just hear what she says, and then I must go
and see some people."

"She purposes being with us on the 22nd if (she adds)
the snow does not prevent her travelling."

"That will be Monday; oh, I am so glad," exclaimed both
the girls.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning Mr. Hamilton proposed, as the roads and paths were now thoroughly beaten, that they should walk to Bird's Bush Farm, a prospect that gave great delight to the young ladies, as it was always a treat to them to go there; the snow-shoes, cloaks, etc., were put on, and they set off.

"The way is less beaten than I expected," observed Mr. Hamilton, "and I am afraid when we get into the valley will be very bad; however, we must do as well as we can. Do you want to turn back, girls?"

"Oh no, thank you, papa, we can walk through much deeper snow than this."

"Yes, but I do not like that you should wade through it over your shoes, but it is firmer here again."

"The high hill behind the house is one sheet of snow," said Ellen, "no sheep can feed there now, and how still the fold yard is; do you think there is anything in it, papa?"

"Oh yes, my dear, but in intense frost like this the animals are all silent; and if the cock crew or the ducks quacked it would be an almost certain sign that some change was about to take place. I have read somewhere that oxen always lick their feet before rain; but remember, the crow of the cock and the quack of the duck must be spontaneous, by which I mean they must be quiet in themselves and not driven or frightened, because you may have noticed that if a boy runs after the fowls, the cock will often get on a gate or pales when the pursuit has ceased and crow as if exulting in his victory. Now Jessy, open the gate, there is no Mrs. Llewellen spinning in the porch now."

"What a heavy knocker," said Jessie, raising the old iron one which hung at the door, rapping with all her strength.

The noise roused the dogs, who barked loudly, and the door was opened by a girl in a clean mob cap, with her fair hair just seen beneath it.

"Is your mother at leisure, Winifred," asked Mr. Hamilton.

"Yes, sir, be pleased to come in; she is gone to clean herself, and will be here just now."

"Very well, Winifred, we will wait till she can come, and

he young ladies will go with you, and see what is in the old-yard, for they fancy it is empty."

"Let me look at the baby first, papa; she is fast asleep. Who will mind her while we go?"

"I will," said Mr. Hamilton.

"Nelly will be here directly, sir," said Winifred.

"What do the poor bees do?" asked Jessie, as they assed the numerous hives set under the kitchen window, which was a very long one, a casement of bright clear glass.

"They don't come out now, Miss; I used to feed them till the frost set in. Morris makes the troughs for me."

"And what sort of things are they?"

"Elder sticks, Miss; one side of the wood cut off, and the oft inside taken out; I can show you some when we go in. put some honey in, or sugar and water, and sets them in ie holes, and the bees eat it, but I only put it in when the in shines, as mother thinks they do not stir when it doesn't, mayhap they are asleep; some folks don't hold with feeding bees, but mother does."

"Papa knows all about bees," said Jessie, "and he can tell; I will ask him."

Winifred had now reached the little wicket gate which d into the fold-yard, where, to the surprise of Ellen and Jessie they found turkeys, geese, ducks, and fowls in abundance, all quietly scratching at the barn door, or sitting perched on the rails or the buildings.

"Why does the turkey-cock sit there?" asked Ellen.

"I think 'tis to warm his feet, Miss."

"Oh! I dare say it is. I remember mamma told me of favourite peacock belonging to some person she knew, being ozen to death during a severe winter; the poor bird set himself on the bars of the gate leading out of the yard, doubtless warm his feet, and was frozen to the gate; so sharp was e frost, it was quite dead when the servant found it, very rly in the morning."

"I mind the blackbirds and other birds sit down to warm eir feet, some of these cold days," said Winifred.

"What a flock of all sorts of little birds at the barndoar."

"Yes, Miss. Neddy makes a dead fall now and then."

"What is that?"

"Why, a board with a hole at one end, with a string

through it, and he sets it up over some corn, upright, and pulls the string, when many birds are under it feeding, and that kills them."

"Oh, dear ! how cruel," said Ellen ; "why do you let him do it?"

"I canna hinder him, Miss," said Winifred, "and he dunna think it harm."

"How still the rooks are," said Ellen, "they do not caw at all, and you can hear the beating of that crow's wings as she flies over our heads. I see several rooks in the rookery."

"Would you be pleased to see the cows ?" asked Winifred.

"No, thank you ; we will come in the spring, when they are milked in the field, or under the trees, to look at them ; and now we will go in to papa. The pigs squeak, and that is the only noise I have heard."

"It is ; they'll be coming to be fed in the court, Miss," said Winifred; and they now saw the pigs scampering into the back court, where a boy was putting their food into the trough.

On going into the kitchen, they found Nelly by the cradle and Mr. Hamilton looking over a little book he had given the family. Mrs. Llewellyn was not come in, but she presently made her appearance in a dark grey linsey-woolsey gown, open in the front, with a check apron, and a black and white check neckerchief on her neck ; a widow's cap shaded very handsome features, with a remarkably sweet expression.

"I am glad to see you look so well, Mrs. Llewellyn," said Mr. Hamilton, going up to her, and shaking hands with her ; "you do not mind this cold weather, I see?"

"Oh ! no sir, I mind not weather, it is his loss I mind ; but I mind what you tell me, sir, and what Winny reads to me ; and it was God's will."

Ellen and Jessie now came up to tell Mrs. Llewellyn how glad their mamma would be to see her, when she could come to the parsonage.

"I canna leave yet, Miss ; I go to church because it's my duty, but I canna leave my home and my children yet ; I will come, please God, and see madam in the spring, as Winny is a good wench, and will look to things in the house."

"It gives me a great deal of pleasure to hear how well your sons conduct themselves, my good woman ; you must

think of the many mercies you are favoured with," said Mr. Hamilton.

"Yes, sir, my children are good children; and I ha' made a many cheeses to year, and Betsy grows," continued she, taking up little Betsy, who was now awake, and who clung to her mother, laying her little rosy cheek on her shoulder, and looking out of the corner of her eye on the strangers.

"Let me have her," said Jessie.

"Her wunna come to you yet, Miss," said her mother, "her will, just now, when hurs quite awake;" and so the baby did, and Jessie was delighted to nurse her, for as long as her papa would let her; and great was baby's satisfaction at succeeding in laying hold of the tail of a tabby cat, who was slumbering in the chimney corner, and not at all inclined to submit to being held by it so tightly as the little fingers clutched it.

Ellen released it with some difficulty, and pussy ran away and hid under a chair, peeping out at baby.

"How nicely you are doing that stocking, Winifred!" said Ellen; "who is it for?"

"Just for Neddy, Miss."

"Hur can knit as well as I can," said her mother, "and her reads the bible to me every day; and a whiles Nelly reads it."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Hamilton, rising to go, and calling his daughters who had gone with Nelly to look at some rabbits in another room, the property of the young Llewellyn's, 'the lads,' as their mother called them.

"May I have one of these rabbits to keep, papa?" asked Jessie. "I will feed it myself, and take great care of it."

"Before you buy a rabbit, Jessie, you must have a hutch made to keep it in, and when that is completed I have no objection to your having one."

"Oh! thank you, papa. Then we may come here and choose one by and by, if Owen and your other brothers will let me, Winifred."

"To be sure they will, Miss," said her mother. "Be pleased, sir, to have a cup of tea and some bread and butter, or some mead?"

"Not anything this morning. No, I cannot drink any ale, Winifred," observing her reaching down from a shelf.

mug, with all the colours of the rainbow on it (and which only left the shelf on especial occasions) ; another time I will taste it ; I know it is always very good."

They left the house in the midst of an uproarious noise the baby Betsy was making for the mug, whose finery had captivated her fancy ; but which her mother wisely insisted should not be given her.

" Poor Mrs. Llewellyn, how well she always looks, papa, does she not ?"

" Yes, my child, she is the picture of a farmer's wife, so tidy, so industrious, so humble, and withal so cleanly ; the Welsh people are not always famous for cleanliness ; but I forget, she is only a borderer, not entirely Welsh, which makes every difference. The borderers are very tenacious of being thought Welsh."

" Then, why papa, have the children Welsh names ?" said Ellen.

" Llewellyn was, to all intents and purposes, a Welshman, being born in Carnarvonshire. His father had a farm at Aber Conway, when he was born, and he met with his excellent wife in that part of Shropshire, which joins Montgomeryshire, and her parents being English, having migrated from Norfolk, I think, gives Mrs. Llewellyn those habits of extreme cleanliness, which she so fortunately for herself and her family possesses."

" Do you remember, papa, when you were sent for to poor Llewellyn's, when he was so ill ?"

" To be sure I do, and a painful scene his death-bed was, an edifying one, too, as I told you, my dears ; he died like a Christian full of faith and hope, and commanding his wife and children to God, ' who has mercifully promised,' he said to me, ' to be a father to the fatherless, as you read to me the other day, and that saying is fresh in my memory too, that gave me such comfort, " Let thy widows trust in me." ' I mind that, Mr. Hamilton, and though 'twas said, I take it, to the Jews, it will serve for the Christians.' These were his very words, poor man ; he died calling on his Saviour, and commanding his family to His mercy ; his poor wife kneeling by his bedside, with her hand clasped in his, striving to stifle her sobs and check her tears, for fear they should disturb his last moments ; the poor children too, kneeling round the be-

and wholly unable to repress their agony of grief, though they strove to do so, when I signed to them, by my hand, that it made their mother worse. Never can I forget the bitter cry that rose, when the relinquished clasp of his poor wife's hand and the drooping head proclaimed that all was over! It rang through the house, and brought both the "gels" (as they call their female servants) to the door, and their grief was also clamorous, when they comprehended what had happened; but their attention was engaged immediately by the sight of their mistress who had fainted, and would have fallen, had I not caught her, and placed her in a chair. I sent for remedies, and she slowly recovered to a sense of her misfortune; she insisted on having her baby brought to her, and tried to make the poor infant comprehend its loss, by making it look at 'father'; but it looked frightened, of course, and began to cry. I persuaded her to take it out of the room, and at length she became composed, and talked of the event with some degree of calmness and resignation. The poor children kissed and comforted her, saying—"It was God's will.' Owen, I well remember, said, 'I hope He will give you strength, mother, and give me grace to be a dutiful son.' I shook hands with him, and told him I would always be a friend to him, as I doubted not he would deserve it. I did not leave them till they became composed, and they all knelt down and prayed with me. You remember seeing the funeral pass, my dears, with the widowed mother and the little sable group: but we will change the subject now. God has blessed and prospered their affairs altogether, and they are going on well; humble as their desires are, they are richer than many who make a great show, the Jenkinsons for instance, they dress beyond their station, and sending their children to what they call 'Boarding Schools,' is ill-judged, for it only gives them ideas which unfit them for their duties, and make them uncomfortable, as they grow up. A girl who is to milk cows and make up butter, has no business to be playing the piano, besides, as Jenkinson cannot afford to buy one, it is all time and money thrown away; but people will be ridiculous. I should not quarrel with their follies if they could afford to indulge in them, but I am talking as if I was speaking to *mamma*. Where is Rover? Did he come with us?"

"No, papa, we have not seen him," said both the girls.

"What a flight of rooks in the air! where are they going?"

"That is more than I can tell you; probably to the roadside to pick up what they can there, for the fields are all lost to them now, poor things!"

"What an enemy Farmer Wellclose is to rooks," said Jessie; "he goes out with a gun on purpose to shoot them. I have seen him creeping along a hedge with his hat in one hand and his gun in the other, till he came within reach of the rooks who were quietly feeding, and then bang went his gun, and he was so pleased if he shot one. I asked him why he shot them, and he said they did *mortal* harm to his corn. Do you think they do, papa?"

"Undoubtedly they do mischief occasionally to the newly-sown wheat, and in fact to many things, but the benefit derived from them is far beyond the evil they do. Ornithologists are great protectors of birds, and warmly defend them from the charges brought against them; they go perhaps too far, but so do ignorant people when they fancy their extirpation would be of advantage. God has made nothing in vain, and I have heard convincing proofs of this in birds being brought back to a place where they had been got rid of, the insects increased so fast."

"What do you mean by ornithologists, papa?"

"People who make birds their study and write on their habits, form, plumage, and all connected with them. You are so fond of birds, Jessie, you would do for a female ornithologist."

"You are fond of them, too, papa; for you will sometimes in the spring stay for an hour near the rookery in the park."

"And hours in the summer with my book," said her father. "There is something very interesting to me in a rookery; I cannot understand their manœuvring, they seem to me to compose a state as much as the bees, and perhaps they have their king and queen too, if we could be initiated into their history; they build earlier than any other bird, and hatch in March, unless the season is very severe. Do you remember what Mr. White says about them? tell me."

"*He says so*, and that when the leaves come out you may see the young ones sitting on the branches, and that they are called *branchers*."

"Right; I like you to remember what has been read to you. I knew a distant relation of Mr. White's, and he took a great delight in natural history, and had a general knowledge of matters connected with it, and all rural subjects from the highest to the lowest, and this rendered him a most pleasant companion. As a familiar instance of his general knowledge, he saw a man one day driving a gander out of his garden, into which it regularly came, he said, Mr. John White directly told him to catch the gander and bring it with a bit of wood to him. The poor man did, and Mr. White showed him how to tie it round the gander's neck, so that it could not get through a hedge, and yet it did not molest the bird. A poor woman's brood of little chickens, too, were all dying of some disease peculiar to poultry, when the weather is unseasonable; it is called, I believe, the pip. Mr. White showed the woman how to remove a piece of skin from the tip of the tongue, and this simple operation restored the chickens; they contract it when it is cold, wet, and dirty, and are seen gasping for breath; they soon recover from the operation. This knowledge, simple as it is, is very useful; when you keep chickens, Jessie, you must expect many casualties amongst them, and I am afraid I cannot show you how to cure the pip; but perhaps Mrs. Wellclose can, for she came from Hampshire, and knows about hens and chickens; so you must ask her for information if you do not get tired of your poultry."

"I do not think I shall, papa, and Ellen thinks she shall like my chickens; I intend to give her a hen and we will try which will have the largest brood of chickens."

"Very well, my dear, I shall expect to have the table bountifully supplied."

"Oh but, papa, you must not expect that," said Ellen, "for Jessie and I have agreed that we should not like to eat the poor little things; so, when they grow large enough, Mrs. Meadows is to buy them, and bring some ready for the table instead."

"Very good, my child, I like the arrangement, and I am sure your mamma will approve it; though, by the way, you may after all eat your own chickens, as Mrs. Meadows may chance to bring them when fat."

"*Oh, but we shall not know anything about them then, so that will not signify.*"

CHAPTER VI.

"I cannot untie my bonnet strings," said Jessie, when they were taking off their things, "they are in such a tiresome knot; I shall ring for Dawson."

"No, do not," said Ellen, "I will try."

"Why, what is Dawson for, but to help us dress and do as we wish?"

"We need not give her unnecessary trouble," said Ellen; "to ring for a trifle is doing so."

"You need not talk any more about it, for I have rung," said Jessie.

"Now, Dawson, come and undo this dreadful knot. How you smell of hashed mutton!"

"We are at dinner, Miss Jessie," said Dawson.

"Why, what o'clock is it?"

"Not quite two, ma'am."

"Oh, very well, thank you."

"Mamma will not be pleased that you rang Dawson up from dinner," said Ellen. "My dear Jessie, I am afraid you are not in a nice humour."

"I don't feel very comfortable for I have not practised, and shall not be able to say my lesson to mamma."

"Why, I thought I heard you playing when I was with papa."

"Yes, but I dawdled, and, instead of keeping on playing, read 'Barring Out,' which I took in with me till the half hour was gone."

"It still wants half an hour; can you not get up your lesson now? Do try; it will vex mamma else."

"But I have not changed my dress, and it is difficult and I am not in the mood; so let me alone, Ellen."

Ellen was very sorry to see her sister in such a temper, and tried ineffectually to win her to a better way of thinking. When they went to their mamma Jessie could not play her lesson, and Mrs. Hamilton was displeased and disappointed, and forbade her going out, or amusing herself in any way till she had learned it perfectly.

At dinner Mr. Hamilton noticed her red eyes and pale face, and asked if she was ill. On learning she was not, and observ-

ing that she looked confused, he desisted from any more questions till the dinner was over, when he asked for an explanation, and on receiving one from Mrs. Hamilton, his manner immediately changed towards Jessie who trembled from the consciousness of having incurred his anger, and dreaded his addressing her, which he soon after did, saying—

“I am sorry, Jessie, very sorry, that you have given pain to your mother” (Jessie’s tears began to flow); “I had thought you comprehended more fully the duty you owe her, to say nothing of the affection which ought to have such an influence over the conduct of a feeling child: obedience is the principle which ought to regulate every action of your life. By disobedience sin came into the world, and if at your age you do not obey the commands of those who have a right to direct you, you will grow up froward and perverse, and instead of a blessing and a comfort to those connected with you, will be a thorn in their side and a grief to all who tenderly love you. I could say a great deal, but I am happy to perceive contrition in your face, and I will only add, that by not complying with every wish of both your tender mother and myself, you offend the God who gave you parents mindful of your welfare.”

Jessie flung her arms round her papa’s neck, and her tears of real sorrow spoke what she could not utter by words; she then went to her mamma, who kissed and hoped she would not give way to temper or indolence again. “I am quite sure, my dear, that you rang for Dawson when she was at dinner, and for the merest trifle; but I will say no more, I can see you are going to be a good girl.”

“One consequence will follow your conduct, Jessie,” said her papa. “I had intended to take you and Ellen to the park to-morrow and give you a long morning to look at the gallery; but this cannot be now, and you have deprived your sister of the pleasure, as I am certain she would not like to go alone.”

“Oh no indeed, papa,” said Ellen.

As soon as she could, Jessie sat herself down to her music and conquered her difficulties, besides learning her next day’s lesson. When they went upstairs to bed she expressed her sorrow for having deprived Ellen of the long-promised pleasure of inspecting all the pictures in the gallery.

"I wish you would go with papa, for I do not deserve to go," and Jessie again gave vent to her tears. "Oh! Ellen, I wish I could always be a good girl. I will try and pray that I may not vex mamma, so unwell as she is too. You told me I should vex her, but somehow I could not get the better of myself."

The next morning Jessie did not want any calling, but got up early and was very diligent and obedient the whole day, and pleased Mr. Hamilton so well he told her he would take her and Ellen to the park on the following day. Having been disappointed, it seemed to them a greater treat than usual, and very diligent were they all day to do everything properly.

"I hope I shall wake early to-morrow," said Jessie, just before she went to sleep.

"It is useless to wake very early," said Ellen, "as we cannot see to get up before Dawson calls us."

"No, but then I shall be ready to spring out of bed directly she is gone."

Jessie did wake at a little past six, and waited impatiently for Dawson, talking very fast to Ellen, who happened to be sleepy, but good-humouredly answered her. At last Dawson's step was heard.

"I thought you would never come," said Jessie.

"Why, Miss Jessie, it is only five minutes after the time."

Jessie was going to be very angry, but recollecting herself, and gulped her anger away.

"It snows very fast, Miss Hamilton," said Dawson.

"How do you know?" said Jessie impatiently.

"Why, Ralph told me that when he opened the back door it beat in his face, ma'am."

"Oh dear," said Jessie when Dawson was gone, "I am afraid we shall not go to the park to-day; we are never to get to the end of the gallery. Look how thick it looks from the window!"

"I am afraid we cannot expect to go," said Ellen calmly.

"Dear, how composed you are about it," said Jessie.

"Why it will not leave off snowing if I am ever so impatient, and we had better do all we have to do and not pass our time in watching the snow, though I like to see the large flakes fall."

"Jessie took her sister's advice, and they were in high
od humour at breakfast, although the weather was very
promising, and by and by they were agreeably surprised
en the sun shone out to hear their father desiring them to
pare for their walk, and on inquiring found the snow had
en (although the flakes were large) slight, and not enough
prevent walking.

"I was so busy with my lessons," said Jessie, "that I
got to look out of the window, but I might have seen from
tracks of Muff's feet that the snow had not been much."

"We shall surprise Mrs. Meredith," said Ellen, "but
is never surprised to see us, and she knows papa does not
e us to mind trifles."

They found Mrs. Meredith very busy making mince pies.

"Why, you are before the time, Mrs. Meredith," said
. Hamilton.

"Oh yes, sir, I am making the mince pies, but I do not
an to have a pie tasted before Christmas eve. I wanted
t to taste the mince, and so thought I would make a pie or
at the same time."

"Very good. I know you always manage these things
perly; and now will you let the young ladies go into the
lery, and stay till I come for them."

"To be sure, sir. But I must wash my hands first."

"No, no, I will take the keys and unlock the doors for
m, if you will trust me."

"Dear! Sir, but I don't like you should have the trouble."

"Oh, never mind," said Mr. Hamilton, taking down the
s.

"What is the use of locking the doors," said Jessie,
hen there is no one to go into the gallery?"

"It is a housekeeper's province to lock up, besides she
not be too careful of the rooms which contain such valua-
es, and she is most faithful in the discharge of her duty."

"And always so pleasant and nice," observed Ellen,
er manners are really good."

"Yes; her early association with the family had its
ct upon her; and now, here we are among lords and
ies, admirals, generals, and all the rest of them."

"Won't you stay and show us Lady Montreville, papa?
are you looking at?"

"I cannot stay, my dears," said he, moving away. "Mrs. Meredith will come when she has done with her pastry."

"I wonder why papa does not like to stay in this delightful place. He always hurries away. Was he looking at a lady or a gentleman?"

"I think he stood opposite this sweet creature," said Ellen. "Oh! come, Jessie, and look at her. She seems to be smiling on us, and yet she looks melancholy. But it is the most beautiful picture in all the gallery. Oh! now I know this must be Lady Montreville herself. Don't you think so, Ellen?"

"Very likely it is, and I suppose that is Lord Montreville opposite. Look, Jessie, he is in an officer's dress, and he is in the army, you know."

"I dare say it is. He is as handsome for a man, but he looks so young."

"Why, it was painted years ago, you know."

"Oh! I had not thought of that. Now, though I could stay here all day, yet I will not, I will go on to the end of the gallery."

They walked off accordingly, but stopped both together on perceiving two pictures turned with the faces to the wall.

"What can these pictures be turned so for?" exclaimed both sisters in a breath.

"Oh! I wish Mrs. Meredith was here, she would tell us all about it, and I hope she will when she comes, and show us the pictures, too."

They noticed next to these blank pictures the portrait of a boy of about ten or eleven, and on the other side another of one younger.

"Oh! Jessie," exclaimed Ellen, "here is our own church, look."

"So there is, and how pretty it looks! See the old woman getting over the stile. I could call to her like old Dame Rivers on a Sunday in her best red clock and black bonnet."

"Yes, but look there at that dear face again by the porch speaking to that very, *very* old man. I am sure it is the same."

"We shall not get to the end now," said Jessie, "if we stay so long at one picture."

"No, but these pictures are all so pretty I do not want

eave them, and yet as I said we would, we will go to the
and come back again."

"There is nothing to be seen from the end window but a
long avenue of chestnut trees. I think they are so long
I cannot see the end of it. I wonder we never walked in
it avenue; how nice and shady it must be in summer!"

"The pictures at the end are prettier than those at the
inning, and here could I stay all day and look into this
of the park. How I like it even now, when it is all
covered over with snow. What must it be in summer."

"Hark! the clock strikes twelve, and here is Mrs.
Meredith."

"I am so glad you are come," said Ellen, running to her;
we want to know why those two pictures are turned to
the wall, and you can tell us who this is and who that is."

"And that and that," continued Jessie, whilst Mrs.
Meredith, turning her head as quickly as she could from one
to the other, tried to make out which pictures they meant,
finding she could not turn it as quick as Jessie spoke,
quietly said—

"You must ask me about one at a time, if you please,
as Jessie."

"Well, Ellen, you ask about which you like first, will
you?"

"Then, pray who is this very beautiful woman?"

"My Lady Montreville."

The tears came into the old housekeeper's eyes as she
led, "She will never come back, I fear."

The young ladies knew better than to ask any more ques-
tions, seeing the poor woman so much affected.

"I will tell you all about it, some day, young ladies; I
ought, perhaps, you knew."

"And that," said Ellen, "is Lord Montreville, is it not?"

"The same indeed, and very like his lordship."

"And now, do tell us who the pictures are meant for
they are turned to the wall," said Jessie.

Mrs. Meredith did not answer, but going up to them,
tended first one and then the other round, and the portraits of
two little girls presented themselves to the astonished gaze of
the sisters; one was very dark, the other very fair; they looked
at the age of six and seven.

"Ladies Mabel and Dorothea Devereux," said Mrs. Meredith, in a solemn subdued voice, sighing deeply.

Nothing further was said for some time ; Ellen and Jessie were too deeply engaged, looking at the sweet children so unexpectedly presented to them : they had fancied these pictures were too frightful to be seen, and for that reason had been turned to the wall. Great was their astonishment to see anything so lovely. Jessie at length said—

"Ellen, I wonder papa never told us of these pretty pictures."

"Perhaps he never saw them," replied Ellen, "but oh ! yes, he must ; but there must be some particular reason for their being turned the wrong way. Perhaps Mrs. Meredith can tell us ?"

"For surely I can, young ladies ; but I will tell you when I tell you about my lady, if you please ; I must set down by my own fireside, when I talk of these things ; I could not say anything about them in this place ; you may look at them as much as you please, and then I will turn them back again, for fear my lord—dear me, I am forgetting myself ! he is far away, and cannot come unexpectedly in here, now-a-days, as he was wont to do."

Great was the curiosity of the Miss Hamiltons to know all about these pictures, but they contented themselves for the present with examining them.

"Which is this with the dark hair and eyes, and what I call a piteous look ?"

"That is Lady Mabel."

"And this with golden hair and blue eyes, and such a small mouth and dimples, was Lady Dorothea ?"

"She was generally called Lady Dora. There is their brother, young ladies ; that is Lord Hume."

"Then he is alive ?" said both sisters, looking at the portrait they had seen hanging by the Ladies Devereux.

"I hope and trust he is, young ladies ; but he is in the army, and we none of us know what may have befallen him by this time. It is very kind of your papa to let me have the newspapers, Miss Hamilton, because I always look all over the 'Gazette,' for besides my young lord, my sister's son is with his regiment, and I like to know whereabouta he is, poor fellow !"

"How long is it since you saw Lord Hume?" asked Ellen.

"Six years, ma'am; he used to come for a day or two, vays in the vacations, when he was at Oxford, just to have look about him; he is very fond of this place. Mr. Devereux was to have gone to Oxford; but my lord so doats him, he cannot bear him away from him, and his health is not strong, and being the youngest too, not but that he could have gone to college if he had staid in England; but a medical gentleman said he must be abroad, and he can'tidy by himself."

"What! that boy is Mr. Devereux, with golden hair and r complexion?"

"Yes, Miss Jessie, he was a most sweet boy. How often we I watched him and his brother chasing each other up the great staircase in the hall, and then down the one leading to the old hall. My lord, with his dark hair waving in the wind, and Mr. Devereux with his light hair, it was a pretty sight to see them, now and then they would come here, and then, if my lord, their father, heard them, he would call out, 'Who is in the picture-gallery?' and away they would go, for they knew they ought not to come here to play. You've not looked at this picture, young ladies; it is the old castle at my dear home in Merionethshire. Is'n't it pretty?"

"Oh, so grand," said the sisters; "you can see the sea?"

"Yes, and there is Cader Idris, and on a very fine day, we could see Snowdon," continued Mrs. Meredith; "but for my part, I never could see what there was to admire in Snowdon more than in Cader Idris, and it is not so very much higher; going to the top of Cader Idris always contented me."

"I wish I was there now," said Ellen, "how much I could like to go up to the top! Do you remember, Jessie, what Mr. Montague said about the ascent, and spending the night on the top, on purpose to see the sun rise?"

"No, I did not hear or did not mind what Mr. Montague was talking about," said Jessie, "what was it?"

"Why, a large party went up and had tents pitched on the top of the mountain, which is so high that the clouds often settle on it, there is some greensward there, and Mr. Montague was awoke out of his sleep by a strange noise which he could not make out; he fancied it must be one o'

the guides whistling to another, as a signal, but it sounded unearthly as the people say. It was repeated, and then out rushed Mr. Montague ; it was about two o'clock and moonlight, and there, standing round the cords which fastened the opposite tent, stood some mountain sheep. They threw up their heads, stamped with their feet, and made the strange noise which Mr. Montague had heard ; it was a sort of shrill vibrating whistle. They repeated it, and then set off with incredible swiftness, and were out of sight in a moment. He supposes that they were frightened at the unusual sight of the tents, and that this was a cry of alarm to their companions.”*

“The cords must have puzzled them indeed,” said Mrs. Meredith, “to say nothing of the tents ; it is not often that parties spend the night there, many come from Barmouth for the day ; they row up the Abermaw, and then land and hire ponies and guides to take them up, and very pleasant it is ; I have made one amongst them many times, and looked over the Arran Fowdy and the Breiddon. The Breiddon, to be sure, is not a very high mountain, but it is famous for all sorts of plants and herbs, and medical men go there from Shrewsbury to gather them and get specimens. I went once with a party from Poole, where I was staying with friends.”

“Poole, why that is in Dorsetshire,” exclaimed Jessie, “for I said it in my lesson to papa not long ago.”

“Ah, Miss Jessie, but I mean Welsh Poole ; you will find it if you look in your maps. We commonly call it Poole there; Powis Castle stands close to it ; my lord and lady used to visit there, and a very beautiful garden it has. I don’t think so much of the castle itself,” added Mrs. Meredith ; “but, dear me, I shall tire you with talking about Wales, which you know nothing of, and we do not get on with the pictures, but may be you have seen enough for this morning, young ladies.”

“If you had time to tell us about Lady Montreville, we would go and hear it instead of staying here any longer,” said Ellen.

“But I have not, Miss Hamilton. Do you hear the clock chimes half-past two ?”

* This is a fact, and was related to the writer by the Rector of Llandrinio, who himself heard the whistle of the sheep, and saw the stamp with the feet, and subsequent flight.

"Dear Mrs. Meredith! why it is past your dinner hour; why did not Phœbe come?"

"No, I told her I would put the dinner by till three, that I might have more time with you; and now you have not seen all that is to be seen before I tell you what I have to tell."

"I could not have believed it was so late," said Ellen, "we have not time for anything now."

"Please, ma'am, Mr. Hamilton's come," said Phœbe's voice sounding through the door.

"Good bye, Mrs. Meredith, we must not keep papa waiting, so we will run to him."

"I wonder papa did not come to fetch us instead of sending Phœbe; he certainly does not like this delightful gallery," observed Ellen.

"Shall we ask him about Lady Montreville?" said Jessie.

"Oh no, he would have told us himself if he had liked; and besides, that would not be right towards Mrs. Meredith, as she promised to tell us."

"Oh, I did not think of that."

"Papa, do you know we are going to ask you to let us go to the park again before my aunt comes?"

"Are you indeed? why I thought, my dears, you would have had as much time there as you could have wished for this morning."

"We did not see all the pictures, we were so taken up with those dear little girls and Lady Montreville; and do you know, papa, Mrs. Meredith is going to tell us all about her, and that is why we so wish to go again. To-morrow is Saturday, that is Mrs. Meredith's busy day, and Monday my aunt comes; perhaps you will let us go early Monday morning. My aunt cannot arrive till the middle of the day."

"My dears, I am of opinion that it will be better to defer going till your cousins come, and then they can go with you."

"Oh no, thank you, papa, we will take them to see the gallery; but Hugh will never sit quietly to hear any story except about dogs or horses."

"Well, my dears, then you must wait till your aunt has left; and perhaps it will be better that you should; not that I see why you should not go without Hugh."

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning Ralph came to say the carpenter had brought what Mr. Hamilton had ordered.

"Oh, very well, then come with me," said Mr. Hamilton to his daughters; "and away they went into the back court, where stood the carpenter beside a large rabbit-hutch. Neither of the girls knew what it was, and asked what it could be for, and what the use of the little doors and wire windows were."

"Suppose you put a cat in, could it get out?" said their papa.

"No, but why should we put a cat in?"

"Ah, that is the question, a cat would be very miserable here; but another animal that I know would be very comfortable, because it never had its liberty, and would have a larger house and be kept clean, perhaps have more delicacies to eat; not that I consider that an addition to any human being's happiness, but many people do, and rabbits may. Now do you guess what this hutch is for?"

"Oh, papa, papa, thank you; it is to keep the rabbits in that we are to have from the farm."

"Exactly so, it is indeed; and you must attend to the directions I shall give respecting them. You must feed them regularly at a fixed hour; Robin will put the food ready for you, and he is to manage the rabbits, by which I mean he will clean, and what he calls 'shift 'em' about as he judges convenient. You could not properly clean the hutch, it would not be a pleasant or a fit employment; feeding them will be quite enough for you. I see, Jessie, you are disappointed, but you would find that you could not manage them entirely yourself, as I know you are fancying you could."

Jessie could not help fancying she could manage them, but she said nothing, and both she and Ellen again thanked their papa for the rabbit hutch, and began to wish for the little creatures who were to inhabit it.

"I think Hugh will like to go with you and choose them," said their papa.

"No doubt he will, and it will be a nice job for him, and a nice walk for us."

In the evening Ellen said, "I am afraid to-morrow will be a very long day with us."

"Why, my dear, I hope you do not think Sunday ever too long?"

"No, mamma, not always, but wishing for Monday will make it seem so; at least, longer than usual."

"You must not think about it, and the time will pass quicker than you expect: you were surprised just now at its being eight o'clock."

"Yes, because papa and I had had such a very nice game at chess, and I was so near beating him; if I had made one move, I should."

"Always console yourself when you lose, Ellen," said her father, "provided you have not been careless; but I don't think, nevertheless, that you would have beaten."

Ellen remained rather incredulous on this point, went to bed and dreamed of checkmating. Sunday passed away happily, as was wont at the rectory; and Monday, the important Monday morning, really came! Ellen and Jessie awoke before daybreak, and were very diligent in their customary occupations, finishing in very good time.

"And now, mamma, we have time to expect my aunt and cousins; and oh, what a delightful employment to sit in the window and watch for them!"

"I doubt if it can be called an employment, Jessie," said her mamma, "but I shall be guilty of watching myself to-day, now that I have done all that is material."

"Yes, mamma; and who will see the carriage first, I wonder?"

"I do not desire to check your anticipations," observed Mr. Hamilton; "but you must bear in mind that the snow has been very deep in the west and south. I have sent to Woodborough, and I find the road from thence here is tolerable; still in many places the horses will be unable to go faster than a footpace, which will retard their progress considerably, and they have forty miles to come to-day, supposing that they slept at the bishop's brother's last night."

"We must not be impatient, it appears," said Ellen; "I shall not begin to watch till after dinner. When Jessie and I have dined we may go and sit in the window-seat as long as we like; may we not, mamma?"

"My dear, you will both dine with us at the customar-

time ; as your cousins travel with your aunt, she will have an early dinner on the road. She expressly says we are not to wait dinner for her."

" Oh, so much the better, I had rather dine with you and papa, and Jessie likes it best, too ; besides, we shall have to dine without you for a long time."

" Except on Sundays."

" Yes, I had forgotten Sundays."

" Mamma, were Julia and Fanny ever without their governess before ? "

" Never, I believe, my dears, and I should have been very glad to have been able to put her away here, as your aunt has never been accustomed to tuition, and will I fear find it irksome ; indeed your papa and I have been contriving to receive Madame de Bourg after a few weeks, or whenever she may wish to come."

" It seems so odd, mamma, that we should know Hugh de Clifford so well, and not know my aunt and cousins at all ; and I do not understand now why he is coming and not Evelyn."

" My dear Jessie, how can Evelyn come when his ship has not arrived ? you forget that you cannot travel over the sea as you would on land, and moreover, that navy officers, any more than army officers, are not at liberty to come and go when they please, even were his ship in port."

" I wonder he did not choose to go into the army when my uncle was in it ; don't you, mamma ? "

" I was surprised at it, but his great friend, Frank Neville, being in the navy, had much to do with it, and he is a bluff fellow, much fitter for a sailor than a soldier ; though when I say that, there are exceptions, for I knew a gentleman in the navy who was even finical in all his appointments ; his cabin was more like a fine lady's drawing-room, and yet he was a very brave officer ; still, the sailor is generally the bluffer character."

" Is Evelyn tall, mamma ? "

" No, very short for his age, and rather stout ; but in all *human probability* you will see him yourself in the course of a few more months, and find out all about him."

" *My aunt must be always anxious about him.*"

" *No, my child, she is happily of that placid temper which*

is not apt to feel much anxiety, and she was always accustomed to General Leslie's going abroad, and being actually in battle, and that makes a great difference. I should deeply feel your father's absence, even were he not going abroad on service; but after all, these are minor trials, and most thankful am I to be exempt from even these; I am afraid it is snowing very fast."

"It is indeed, mamma; oh, I am so sorry!"

The dinner hour arrived, and the sisters could scarcely eat for watching the windows, through which, however, they saw only the snow falling in large flakes. As soon as the cloth was removed they both sat themselves down in the window-seat and began to strain their eyes, looking towards the road which wound down the hill, and declaring they did not feel anything like cold.

"Nevertheless, we will have some more coals on the fire, Ralph," said Mr. Hamilton, "and tell Patty to mind that the fire burns brightly in the west room."

"Now I think of it," said Jessie, "I must go and look at the room, it is so delightful to see a room prepared for a visitor, and that visitor an aunt one does not remember; will you not go, Ellen?"

"No; perhaps the carriage will come whilst I am upstairs."

"Call me directly if you see it."

"Oh, how nice it all looks," said Jessie, running into the room and looking at Patty, who was stirring up the fire that her master's orders might be complied with. "Patty, should you not like a fire in your room?"

"Laws no, miss, I never stays long *enuff* to want one. I hear Miss Hamilton calling you, miss," said Patty, and away flew Jessie, and out of breath ran into the hall.

"Where are they, where are they?" said she.

"Who?" said Ellen.

"Why, the carriage; I thought they were come, by your calling me."

"I am sorry I disappointed you, Jessie, but I saw some object on the hill, and fancied it must be what we expected to see; and, instead of my aunt's carriage, it is papa's cart with coals."

"Which I am glad to see," said her papa; "we shoul-

look very dolefully without them ; the joy of meeting would not keep us warm."

"Here comes a man on horseback," said Ellen ; "he is a stranger, for he does not know where the gate is."

In a few minutes Ralph appeared to say 'that Mrs. Leslie's servant was come, and that the carriage was following.'

"Now, mamma, come to the window, won't you," said both the eager girls.

"Yes, my dears, now I will come."

"Then there it is," exclaimed both at once, and slowly through the snow and the dusk, for the twilight was fast approaching, a carriage made its way.

"Why there are six horses," said Ellen. "How cold Hugh must be ! he is on the barouche. I think now they are coming full trot."

Presently the carriage was at the door, Hugh de Clifford limping into the hall, and Mr. Hamilton taking out Mrs. Leslie, led her into the drawing-room and went back for her daughters, whom, however, he found in the hall kissing and shaking hands with their cousins.

"I could not wait for you, uncle," said they both in a breath ; "when we saw Ellen and Jessie in the hall, we jumped out and ran in. I do not know why Hugh did not come to help us, as it was so slippery, but Jenkins' arm did as well."

"Come, my dears, into the drawing-room, and we will make him give an account of himself."

"So these are my own dear nieces," said Mrs. Leslie, kissing Ellen and Jessie.

"And these are the little children I left eight years ago," said Mrs. Hamilton, kissing the Misses Leslie, who flung their arms round their aunt's neck, and warmly returned her embrace.

"Where is Hugh?" said Mr. Hamilton.

"Here, sir," said a voice from the fire rug.

"Oh there you are, and pray how is it that the ladies endure the cold so much better than you do, and that you did not help them out of the carriage ?"

"I am half frozen," said poor Hugh. "You might have seen me limp when I first got down, and I could not have

walked to the door, much more helped anybody. I cannot move my right leg now."

"We must help you, my poor boy," said Mrs. Hamilton. "Do not stand so near the fire ; it is the very worst thing you can do. Mr. Hamilton will take you into another room and your leg and foot shall be rubbed till the circulation is restored."

Hugh accordingly made his exit with Mr. Hamilton's assistance, and whilst the sisters began to talk to each other, the cousins rapidly formed an acquaintance.

"How cold you must have been," said Ellen.

"Why, we were cold, to be sure," said Julia, "but my uncle had a horn lanthorn provided for us in the carriage, and plenty of hot eggs to hold in our hands, which we had renewed when we stopped to change horses. Hugh would not take any, although we tried to persuade him, liking, he said, to be *hardy*, which has chilled him, as you see. Mamma insisted on Annette's taking some, and she, I dare say, got very well in doors, and did not limp like poor Hugh. Poor I call him, but he does not like to be called so, and hates to be pitied."

"Julia, my aunt is calling you," said Fanny.

"I wanted to look at you again, my love," said her aunt, "you have changed very much since I saw you."

"I hope you think I am grown like you, and mamma, aunt," said Julia, "for if I am like one I must be like the other."

"I do not know who you are like," said Mrs. Hamilton, kissing her ; "but I will now go upstairs with you all, and take you myself to your rooms."

"No, pray mamma, do not," said Ellen ; "you forget what an invalid you have been."

"I do indeed forget it," said her mother ; "the pleasure of seeing you, Fanny, has made me fancy myself equal to anything ; but I will depute Ellen. Go my child, children I may say, for Jessie will not be left behind, and show your aunt and cousins their rooms ; we do not need a groom of the chambers."

"You have not been used to such a small house as this is," said Ellen. "You will have no difficulty in finding your way about. Shall I ring for Jackson or Annette, I believe her name is?"

"If you please, my dear; how comfortably warm the room is!"

"Julia and Fanny are very near you," said Jessie, crossing the passage. "From our window," added she to her cousins, "you can see one of our favourite walks to the park where we so often go, and where we look forward to taking you."

"I do not much care for a park," said Julia, "I like a heath much better, and I fancied there was one hereabouts."

"So there is," said Ellen, "we can either go through the village to it, or through the park, and a nice wild place it is, but all places look alike now, the snow is so deep."

"Oh! we shall see it all when it melts," said Fanny, "and we do not mind walking about in the snow; we got almost up to our knees one day, at Red Cliffs; but mamma does not like that we should get wet, and poor Mrs. Du Bourg was in such an agony about it."

"Fanny, you should not say agony;" said Julia, "you know Mrs. Du Bourg said it was too strong an expression for trivial things."

Fanny laughed. "Well, I will try and remember, but I am very apt to forget myself."

"Do you like Mrs. Du Bourg?" asked Jessie.

"Yes, we love her even; she is a very dear creature, and has been so afflicted. I will tell you all about her when I have time."

"Somebody taps at the door," said Ellen. "Come in."

"Can I help you take off your tings, Miss Leslie?" said Annette, opening the door.

"No, thank you, Annette; we have taken them off; you do not look as if you had been at all cold," added Julia.

"No, tank you, Miss Leslie. I was not in the little, poor Mr. Le Cliff, he amost perish."

"Yes, indeed, he was very cold."

"You go, please, to my lady before you go down, Miss Leslie."

"Very well, Annette; you may go now."

"Will she find her way?" asked Ellen.

"She must try, and the sooner she finds it out the better; mamma will never let us be assisted in little difficulties," said Fanny.

"I think we had better go to her now," said Julia. "Oh! I feel we shall be so happy here with you and Jessie, to say nothing of Aunt and Uncle Hamilton. I know we shall like them, and everything about the house. Is this mamma's door?"

"No, that is mamma's," said Jessie. "My aunt's is exactly opposite your door."

"Ah! I see; good-bye, we shall not stay long with mamma."

As soon as the door was shut, Ellen and Jessie ran downstairs, and found Mrs. Hamilton alone.

"Oh! dear mamma, how beautiful Julia is, exclaimed both in a breath; did you ever see such hair! As soon as she took off her bonnet, it seemed as if no comb could keep it in order, and it curls and waves all round her face so prettily."

"What does so prettily?" said Mr. Hamilton, who came in with Hugh at the moment.

"Why, Julia's hair, papa; don't you think her beautiful?"

"She is not at all beautiful," said Hugh.

"How can you say so?" said Ellen.

"Well, I do say so, her nose is not straight; is it, Mr. Hamilton?"

"I do not know, indeed," said Mr. Hamilton, laughing.

"I think even if it is not what you call straight, she is very pretty."

"Fanny is the prettiest," said Hugh.

"We will not dispute the point with you," said Mr. Hamilton. "Gentlemen may differ, although allowed to be better judges than ladies."

"But papa, do give your opinion; you have not said, and now it is too late, for here they come downstairs."

"You shall hear it to-morrow, my dears," said their father.

"You do not look an invalid, my dear Ellen," said Mrs. Leslie to her sister, "I am delighted to find you so much better than I had anticipated."

"Your arrival has flushed her," said Mr. Hamilton, "she will look pale to-morrow."

"But I am greatly better," said Mrs. Hamilton, "and feel quite strong."

"Can you walk out of the grounds, aunt?" asked Julia.

"No, my dear, I have not ventured into them even, yet."

"I am very sorry for that, I am so fond of walking; I like everybody to be able to walk."

"Oh; your uncle and cousins will walk as much as you like; and does Fanny like walking too?"

"Yes; but I am not such a walker as Julia. They do not walk in France as they do here. I never knew any girls take what we call a walk in France, they seem as if they would not walk. I am not so bad as that; but my cousins at Joybank used to surprise me by the long walks they took, in which Julia joined them."

"Why do you look so sad?" said Julia, turning to Jessie.

"Oh! dear, because I am afraid Fanny will not be able to go up the hollow way, or to the blue mountains."

"Oh! do not fear, I shall improve with you, perhaps."

"No, not if you did not with your cousins."

"Yes, but we do not like them so well, as I am sure we shall you."

Hugh laughed, and said, "Look at me, Ellen, this is the way Emmeline walks across the room; you cannot see her feet move."

"Oh, Hugh, do not take them off," said Fanny, "mamma does not like it."

Mrs. Leslie smiled, and Hugh sat down.

"But I do not understand, if she moves her feet so, how she can take long walks," said Jessie, after a pause.

"Emmeline does not walk except in the conservatory, or on the terrace, now and then; it is Henrietta and Caroline who walk so much; they say if my uncle would let them they should like to shoot, and they would hunt, if he did not expressly forbid it."

"Why, it would not be exactly the thing for a bishop's daughters to be hunting," said Mr. Hamilton.

"Mrs. Greville is a very masculine woman, and not at all particular as to proprieties," observed Mrs. Leslie, "which may, in part, account for her daughters' prepossessions; but it is so strange that little Osric is the gentlest and sweetest of children. I have often lamented that he could not change character with his sisters, it is impossible not to love that boy; but you look tired, Ellen, and should not stay too long with us."

"No, I am not much tired, and my tea will quite set me right; that is a luxury which I dare say you scarcely understand, Fanny, so much, as you have been abroad."

"Oh! but I have never forgotten how much we used to enjoy our tea in the poor old parlour, with the jessamine peeping in at the window, when you and I were about our children's ages, and after that." Tears came into the eyes of both the sisters, as recollections pressed upon them, and for a few minutes nothing was said.

"By the way, can you make tea?" asked Mr. Hamilton of his sister-in-law, "because it will be too fatiguing for Ellen, and it will be too large a party for little Ellen, as we sometimes call her."

"Dear me, I can make tea, of course," said Mrs. Leslie. "My dear Mr. Hamilton, what do you take me for? a very useless being, I am afraid; only tell me if you like cream and sugar in it, and I will show you how well I can perform."

"I did not doubt your capability, I only thought you might find it troublesome."

"Oh! not at all; do my nieces drink tea?"

To Mr. Hamilton's surprise he observed a something amounting to a frown on Ellen's brow, which was generally so open and unclouded: he looked at her steadily, and she seemed to make an effort to recover herself, as she answered—

"Dear, yes, aunt."

"I forgot, my dear, how much you have lived downstairs. I know so many girls who are in the school-room, and even in the nursery at your age, at their meals, and are only allowed milk and water."

"How very silly!" said Jessie, now paying some attention to what was going on.

"It depends on the different ideas people have, my dear," said her father; "they may consider us silly for not doing as they do."

"Do you have tea?" asked Jessie of her cousins.

"Yes, now we do, but we have not had it long."

Jessie looked silly upon this, and said no more.

"Jessie, are you as fond of battledore and shuttlecock as ever?" said Hugh.

"Quite."

"And we can play delightfully at the castle in the hall."

"Dear! I had forgotten that, but I was a very little girl then," said Jessie, laying a stress on *very*.

"We will go and have a game to-morrow, shall we? or rather, may we, sir?" said Hugh to Mr. Hamilton.

"Why, you might do so; but as the lake is in such excellent trim for skating, I think you should take advantage of that, and you can play at battledore when the frost is gone."

"Oh, skating, that is capital! I never thought of that; I like it above all things; but then, what amusement will that be to Ellen and Jessie, and my cousins?"

"They will like to look at you, and they are trying to learn to skate themselves when the lake is unoccupied."

"Better and better," said Hugh, rubbing his hands, "but where am I to get my skates?"

"I will send to Ravensmoor in the morning by the postman, who is going there, for some; he will be back, I expect, by breakfast time; or, perhaps Lord Mortimer can lend you his."

"I had rather have some of my own, if they can be got."

"Very well, *nous verrons*; and now, my dears, I am sorry to interrupt your conversation, but the half-hour bell has rung some little time."

"Can it be, papa?" said both his daughters.

"Look at the timepiece."

"Yes, it is indeed half-past nine; I had no idea it was so late myself," said Mr. Hamilton.

"You must go to bed directly after prayers, my dear, yourself."

"Yes, I feel I must."

Whilst the customary good nights and shake hands were being given, the cousins expressed their impatience for the next morning, when many things were to be done, seen, and said.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I HAVE so many things to say to you, Ellen, I do not know where to begin," was Jessie's observation the instant the door was shut, and Dawson had disappeared.

"Yes, I do not doubt it, but, my dear Jessie, we must talk to-morrow morning, and go to sleep now, as it is very late, and mamma will be disturbed at our talking now!"

"Ah well, I believe we must; but I must say I think my aunt is a sweet creature, so gentle and rather melancholy."

"She has never recovered my uncle's loss I have heard mamma say."

"Which is like him, Julia or Fanny?"

"Oh Julia, he was so very handsome; but good night, dear Jessie."

The next morning, at breakfast, Hugh de Clifford was so impatient for the arrival of the person who had been despatched to Ravensmoor that he could scarcely sit still, and every time the door opened expected to see his skates.

"There he is," said Mr. Hamilton, "I see him on the hill."

"Has he got any skates, sir?"

"I cannot see, my dear fellow, at this distance; I can but just see the man himself; look at him, making his way through the snow; how he plunges, poor fellow. Upon my word, I doubt if we shall get to the park ourselves to-day; the road seems impassable, and the lake will be loaded, not merely covered, with snow; our only chance is that it has not had time to freeze, and perhaps Mr. Elphinstone will have it swept."

"Oh, I can sweep it, sir; let me have a broom."

"I rather doubt your powers there; you are not aware of what you undertake; but as I always like people to be convinced, you shall try, provided we can get there."

Here the door opened, and Ralph came in empty-handed.

"Where are the skates?" exclaimed Hugh, without waiting to hear what he had to say.

"Please sir, Dick could not find any, and Mrs. Davis says there be none."

"Did she send a written answer?"

"Yes, sir, here it is."

"Alas, it is too true; there are no skates in Ravensmoor," said Mr. Hamilton.

"What a stupid place it must be—a very *beast* of a place!" exclaimed Hugh, in his excitement.

"My boy, I shall not allow you to say beast, because, if you do, Ellen and Jessie will infallibly catch it, and I do not like the word."

"Why, we all say beasts at Eton."

"That may be, but I do not approve of everything said there, much as I like Eton, where I rowed so merrily, and played so happily at cricket, and swam so bravely—I see it all now, and poor old Dr. Heath!"

"I met a Winton at the Bishop's," said Hugh, "and I was so sorry we could not have a bout at cricket; he could not row worth a farthing, of course, even if the weather had been open, but we might have played at cricket."

"Why, you would have been perished, and you could not play alone."

"No, but there was Griffith Campbell and Somerset, and then the farmers' sons might have come in to play."

"Yes, but very unequal odds, if you were all Etonians."

"No, but we were not; they are Westminster and Rugby. I was more anxious about it because Winton beat me at chess."

"Oh, oh, I see," said his guardian.

"What was his name?" said Jessie.

"You are always anxious for a name," said Hugh; "why Jessie, it was Leicester."

"I am sorry he had such a pretty name," observed Jessie.

Hugh laughed. "Poor fellow, I must not make him enemies; he was a good fellow enough, though a little bumptious."

Mr. Hamilton was glad to see the disappointment about the skates got over so well; but Hugh soon began to talk about them again, and it was agreed they should go to the lake, and see if Lord Mortimer was there, and borrow his skates if he was not.

"I fear," said Mr. Hamilton, "you cannot go, my dears."

The young party looked very anxious, and all protested they did not mind the snow.

"I will go and reconnoitre," said Mr. Hamilton; and on his return he pronounced it possible that they might make their way, with snow-shoes, etc. They were soon ready, and off they went, with Roger as guide, with one broom on his shoulder and another in his hand.

"It is so cold, my nose feels as if it were frozen," exclaimed Fanny.

"By the way, my dear, it is a pity you came," observed her uncle, "as you are not a walker."

"Oh, I am not so bad as that, uncle; I can manage the lake, if it is not farther than you say."

Now and then one of the party plunged deep into the snow, which afforded much amusement to the others. At length they reached the park, and Roger came to say he saw some people on the ice.

"So much the better for us," said his master; "you, Hugh, will not be required to try your powers of sweeping."

As they drew near, they observed some men clearing away the snow, and some gentlemen directing and overlooking them; among them stood Lord Mortimer, with his skates in his hand.

"Good-bye to my chance for to-day," said Hugh.

"I am sorry for your disappointment," said Mr. Hamilton, and advancing, introduced his nieces and his ward to Mr. Elphinstone, Colonel de Lancey, and his nephew.

"Don't you skate?" said Lord Mortimer to Hugh.

"Why, I do occasionally, but I have not my skates with me."

"I am sorry for that; I should like to have had a bout with you."

"How long will the men be clearing the lake?" asked his lordship.

"About half an hour, I should think," answered his uncle.

"A bright thought has just occurred to me," said Mr. Hamilton; "I have no doubt Lord Hume's skates, or his brother's, are at the park, and I will go and get Mrs. Meredith to rummage them out."

"Shall we go with you, papa?" asked Ellen.

"I think you had better go, you will find it uncomfortable here, and you can walk to us when we are fairly launched."

"I did not wish Julia and Fanny to have seen the house in the snow," said Jessie, "but it cannot be helped."

"May I come with you?" said Lord Mortimer, "I am tired of waiting here."

"Certainly," said Mr. Hamilton, "your staying here cannot expedite the clearance."

De Clifford and Lord Mortimer were acquainted in five minutes, and began discussing the merits and demerits of Eton and Westminster, making all sorts of matches to try their skill hereafter. The young ladies were much amused by the prejudices of their companions as to the skill of their friends and contemporaries ; they modestly kept their opinion of their own to themselves. Mr. Hamilton smiled every now and then as he listened to the boys.

They found Mrs. Meredith knitting as usual, and Phoebe had enough to do to provide chairs for so large a party.

"Are you come to the gallery, sir?" inquired Mrs. Meredith.

"No, we are on quite a different errand to-day. I want to know if you have any skates you can find to lend this young gentleman."

"Well, indeed, I do not know, sir. I never noticed any, but I will go and look in my lord's dressing-room, and I will look too in Ellis's room."

"I shall be much obliged to you," said Mr. Hamilton, and away trotted Mrs. Meredith.

"This is a comfortable housekeeper's room," said Julia, "and how pretty it must be from the casements in the spring. Poor Johnstone at my uncle's has only a court to look into."

"Mrs. Meredith is very pleasantly situated in very many ways," said Mr. Hamilton, "and she deserves to be so, for a very valuable person she is."

"I shall think her so if she gets me some skates," said Hugh, who was looking out of the window. "Whose cat is that stepping as if she was on hot irons through the snow, and shaking her feet at every plunge?"

"Oh, that," said Ellen, "is Fowdy."

"What?"

"Fowdy."

"What a name!"

"Yes. Mrs. Meredith is so fond of Merionethshire that she has called her cat after the mountain near to where she was born."

"Oh I know," said Hugh, "somewhere near M— going to Dina's mouth."

"Yes, that is it."

Mrs. Meredith now made her appearance empty-handed.

"Can't you find any skates, ma'am?" asked the impatient Hugh.

"Yes, Sir, I have found two pair and sent them to be well brushed."

"Oh! thank you."

They were presently brought, and one pair fitted delightfully.

"Ay, those were my young lord's. I well remember us setting off as you may do, to skate, sir."

"Oh! Mrs. Meredith," said Jessie, "may Phœbe come presently just to see the skating, she has a great desire to look at it!"

"Why, yes, Miss Hamilton, if she does not stay long."

"Thank you, miss," said the delighted Phœbe.

Lord Mortimer and De Clifford asked if they might set off and begin, and were soon on the lake, both acquitting themselves extremely well. Indeed, the young ladies could not decide which was the most expert. Circles and figures of 8 were cut alternately, and they seemed to fly over the lake, Fanny and Jessie wondering how they managed to avoid each other when passing so closely. As for Phœbe, she clapped her hands with delight, and even the sturdy keepers came to look on.

At length Mr. Elphinstone proposed that they should send for chairs and take the young ladies on the ice. They were procured by the keepers and browsers in a trance, and to their great delight Ellen and Julia were soon seated and guided with the rapidity of lightning almost over the lake by Mr. Elphinstone and Colonel De Lancey. A friend of the former took Jessie, and Fanny, as the most delicate, was Mr. Hamilton's charge.

At length the old clock warned them that it was time to give over their pastime, and having thanked the gentlemen for their kindness, they returned to the parsonage, Hugh promising to follow them in time for dinner, as he was just engaged in cutting out an 8, trying to accomplish it before Lord Mortimer, who could not find time to even raise his cap, just nodding with folded arms across to the party as they left the lake.

"What a treat you have given us, uncle," exclaimed

Julia, "I have not been so well pleased for a very long time."

"Nor have I."

"Nor I," exclaimed Ellen and Jessie. "Did you not like it, Fanny?"

"Yes, thank you, but I like a quieter thing better; still I enjoyed myself pretty well."

On reaching home they found their mamma and aunt seated where they left them.

"Is it possible you are returned?" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton; "Fanny and I have been so interested in our talk that I had no idea of the hour."

"I believe it is the young ladies' dinner-hour," said Mr. Hamilton, looking at the timepiece.

"So it is indeed, and we must go and take off our things directly," said the young ladies, running up the stairs where Annette was in waiting.

"I take Miss Hamilton's tings, too," said Annette.

"Thank you, but where is Dawson?"

"I tell her I take your tings, ma'am."

"I do not see why you should have a state dinner for me, my dear Ellen," said Mrs. Leslie, "I should like to dine with you just as you dine when I am not here, and I am certain that Hugh had rather dine with the young party."

"Well, be it so in future," said Mr. Hamilton, "we will dine at four instead of five or three, which will give the young man a longer morning. I anticipate great things to be done between him and Lord Mortimer, what with skating shooting wild-fowl, etc."

"But are they to be trusted with guns?" asked Mrs. Leslie.

"Oh yes, with Johnstone, who is a staid old keeper, and will take great care of them."

"Now Ellen," said Julia, "you are to take the head of the table."

"Dear me, how odd it seems!" said Ellen. "Miss Leslie will you have some chicken or some mutton?"

"A little mutton, if you please, Miss Hamilton."

"Shall Jackson come and cut it for you?" asked Julia
"he is used to carving."

"Indeed I manage very badly, but I can manage," said Ellen. "I begged mamma to have everything placed for us; I thought we should like to be quite by ourselves, without any attendant."

"I enjoy it particularly," said the cousins. "At the castle we were quite a large party, with my cousins there and the two governesses; but it was of course very stiff, as we did not know much of Mrs. Mannering or Mademoiselle, not but that they are pleasing in their way."

"Did Hugh dine with you?" asked Jessie.

"Oh dear no. What should we have done with him? He dined with the bishop and the dean, and I know not who; we had very delightful evenings there; so much good music, and chess, and once a week we danced in the great gallery, one of the servants playing extremely well on the flute and another on the violin. There was a French valet, too, of Mrs. de Courcy's, who played the guitar."

"Mrs. de Courcy has a French valet," exclaimed Ellen.

"Well, it does sound oddly, but she kept him in her service because he had travelled with her husband, and he was attached to him."

"Did the bishop dance?" asked Jessie.

"Dear no! he only came in for five minutes sometimes to look at us, and then walked away. Caroline dances so beautifully, it is delightful to look at her; she was always called 'the Grace'—her figure is proportion itself."

"What does that mean?" asked Jessie, "and why was she called 'the Grace'?"

"Proportion means symmetry," said Julia, "and the Graces, you know, my dear Jessie, were remarkable for their elegance."

"Did they really live then?"

"Oh, no, they were among the fabulous persons of the heathen mythology."

"Ay, such as Juno and Iris; I know who they were."

"Well," said Ellen, "after dinner we will look out the Graces, and you may read who they were. A young lady the other day wanted to know who Terpsichore was, she being the Goddess of dancing; so you may call Caroline her pupil."

"Evelyn is so fond of dancing," observed Fanny; "

uncle says sailors generally are. I wish you could see him dance a hornpipe with Ben fiddling to him."

"Who is Ben?" asked Jessie.

"One of the under-gardeners, who was a sailor for a short time, but got some wound in his hand which rendered him incapable of going aloft as he calls it, so my uncle Glenville got his discharge, and sent him down to us, thinking he might be of use in the gardens; and so he is, and such a favourite of Evelyn's. When you come to us you will know all about him and about us all. Oh, I wish you had been to see us!"

"The pleasure is all to come," said Ellen, "and you know nothing about us here yet; it wants an hour to papa's dinner. What shall we do before we go into the drawing room?"

"Oh, play at chess if you like; I want to know which has the best chance."

The men were soon placed, and Ellen and Julia seated at the board.

"Can you play, Fanny?" asked Jessie.

"No, I cannot play well; I just know the moves."

"So do I," said Jessie; "papa is teaching me; we can practise together."

"My cousins held me in utter contempt for many things," said Fanny; "I did not hunt, I could not bear to see a poor hare killed by Mr. Mordaunt's greyhounds; I do not dance well, and I could never hit the bull's-eye on the target."

"And could Julia do all this?"

"Why, yes, she can dance, and shoot, and play so well at battledore and shuttlecock, but she did not like any more than myself to see the hare killed."

"I am sure I could not have borne it," said Jessie; "and if I did like it, papa would never let us go coursing."

"It is very strange that my uncle should like my cousins to hunt, but my aunt is not at all particular, and so very good-tempered my cousins do almost as they like."

"I should like that," observed Jessie, "but what shall we play at, Fanny?"

"*Draughts*, if you like."

"Very well, we will then."

"*Halloa*, what are you about?" exclaimed Hugh, bursting

into the room with the skates in his hand. "I am just going to dress for dinner, but I wanted to tell you what a famous skate I have had; so I asked my guardian where you were, and he told me I might look in."

"Which beat, Hugh?" asked Jessie,

He laughed. "We do not call it beating, Jessie, but I cut the best 8, and made the most perfect angle. Julia, I can see you are losing the game."

"Indeed, I am afraid I am, but you must not come and look on."

"Not for the world; besides, I am wet through with the snow, and must go directly." So saying, he ran off.

"I am glad Hugh did beat," said Jessie.

"Don't you like Lord Mortimer, then?" said Fanny.

"Yes, very well; but we know very little of him; he only comes every year to see his uncle, Colonel De Lancey, who lives by himself, and comes sometimes to call on papa."

"We must go now," said Ellen, "the half-hour bell has rung."

"May we stay to finish our game?" said Jessie.

"You must not be very long, or we shall keep Dawson," said Ellen.

The game was finished, and in time, and the young ladies were dressed and in the drawing-room when the party assembled before dinner.

"How well mamma looks!" said Ellen to Jessie; "I am so glad to see her so much better; my aunt has been as good as a physician to her."

Mrs. Hamilton heard the remark, and turned with an affectionate smile to her child, who, running to her, threw her arms round her neck and kissed her tenderly, Jessie following her example.

"How much I like to see that!" observed Mrs. Leslie to Mr. Hamilton, "but I expected to find your children just what they are—the children of nature."

"I should say my nieces were just as natural," said Mr. Hamilton, "in their way, but they have seen so much more of the world already than my daughters, that their *nouveté* is altogether different. We have reason to be abundantly thankful," continued he, "as I hope we are."

"Dinner, if you please, sir," said Ralph, throwing open the door.

"Do you know," said Ellen, when the party were gone, "papa cannot make Ralph say 'Dinner is on table, sir or ma'am,' instead of 'Dinner is ready, sir,' and he is so obstinate he will not do it."

"What does it signify?" said Fanny; "I should not know what he said; I never mind those sort of things, but I dare say Andrews could teach him if my uncle wished it. And now, Jessie, shall we play at draughts again?"

"I thought we were to sit round the fire and talk," said Julia, "whilst they dine; we can play games after tea."

"It will be the best plan," said they all, and gathered themselves round the fire accordingly.

"What is the reason," asked Julia, "that that fine old place we were at this morning is deserted? I wonder the family do not spend the Christmas there."

"They are all abroad, and have been for a very long time," answered Ellen; "papa knows something about them, but he seldom talks of them. Lord Montreville cannot come back because Lady Montreville is in such bad health, but Mrs. Meredith is to tell us all about it some day or other. We often go and have long chats with her; she is such a dear old woman—above the generality of housekeepers," papa says, "being the daughter and widow of very respectable lawyers."

"Was her husband the steward, then?" asked Julia.

"Yes; she has been a widow for years. Her attachment to Merionethshire, her native county, is very great. She thinks nothing in the world can compare to it, and her attachment to the family under which her family have lived so long is equal to it. She is always lamenting over them."

"I think mamma has seen them. I am certain she has seen Lady Montreville," observed Julia.

"Dear! how delighted Mrs. Meredith will be to talk to her about her. She must come here if my aunt will not go to the park."

"But she will when the snow is gone, I have no doubt of that. She likes walking very much, and is a very good walker."

"What a nice large party we shall be!" said Jessie. "I wish Evelyn was but here."

"Oh that he was!" said Fanny, "how happy we should

be! but he will be with us, I hope, before we leave, for his ship is expected in February."

"But then Hugh will not be here, for he must go to Eton next month," said Julia.

"Well, he will come again at Easter and at Midsummer," said Jessie.

"No, not at Midsummer. The holidays are not till August."

"Well, I hope my aunt will stay at least twelve months with us now she is come," said both the Misses Hamilton; "at least," added Ellen, "if she will not find it dull."

"How can you talk of dulness? I am sure we shall be so very happy, and you are so nearly of our own age too. We have always been with girls older than ourselves, and though very nice girls, they seemed to consider it a condescension to talk much with us."

"Why, Caroline is not older," said Ellen.

"Yes, she is a year older than I am, and ten years older, mamma used to say, in many things."

"Do you play the harp, Julia?" asked Ellen.

"I am beginning to learn, but I shall not be able to play for some time. I am so very fond of it. It was my delight when we stopped in Wales to hear the harp, even when we only changed horses. I caught a tune or two; at Carnarvon there was an old blind harper who played delightfully. Fanny and I danced an hour to his music, as mamma had him upstairs after tea to play to us."

"We cannot dance," observed Jessie.

"Dear! that is a pity. Madame du Bourg could teach you. She teaches very well indeed."

"Poor madame," said Julia.

"Oh! you are to tell us her history."

"Yes, but we shall not have time now. I do not like to begin a story and leave off in the middle."

"Oh no!" exclaimed the party, better to wait till tomorrow, when we shall be uninterrupted."

"I am coming to interrupt," said Hugh, opening the door. I heard something about interrupting. I suppose I may come in, as, like little boys, I am rather tired of sitting still; not that it is formal here, but you can understand I had rather come to you, if I may."

"Oh yes, yes," said all unanimously, and Hugh seated himself amongst them.

"I wish we were intimate enough to have Lord Mortimer here," said Ellen, "it would be so pleasant for you, but we do not know much of him, and papa does not like making many new acquaintances."

"Oh! I shall get on famously," said Hugh. "I do not care about having him in the house, and I have secured him for a companion out of it. I am going to beat you all at chess to-night."

"Really you have a very good opinion of your own playing," said Julia; "I wish Ellen may beat you."

Hugh only smiled as if he did not think she could, and began to tell them, at their desire, of his own occupations at Eton.

"Do you like the place?" said Fanny.

"Why, what are you thinking of?" said Hugh; "you know, Fanny, I abominate and detest it."

"Dear me!" said Ellen, "why did Gray then write such pretty lines about it? Papa read them to us."

"Oh! but those lines refer to the college, and I thought Fanny meant Eton in itself."

"So I did," said Fanny; "I meant the village."

"Oh! that is a filthy place. I never wish to see it again, and yet I daresay when I am a man I shall like to revisit it; but the college I really like. I am proud of being an Etonian. I had rather be there than at Westminster or Winchester; besides, we have so many good fellows there, all 'true blue,' as Evelyn would say. We lost one of them last year. Poor Mildmay left for Winchester. He was as sorry to go as we were to part with him, but his mother could not let him stay at Eton."

"Why?" inquired Jessie.

"Because his father was killed in an action off some place, and he is an only son—child I should say, and she lives near Winchester, and can have him every Sunday to dine with her. He used to be a capital player at cricket, and we all liked him. Poor fellow! oh! how he cried after Doctor — told him of his father's death. I went to him and stayed with him till his uncle fetched him. He was ill, and could not come for him for some days, and Mrs. Mildmay

i was unable to leave her room. I believe she kept it for some time. I know the dog was taken to her."

"What dog?" asked Jessie.

"Oh, Captain Mildmay's dog that he was so fond of. A brother officer brought it to her, and she saw it in her own room."

"Is it alive now?" asked Ellen.

"I believe so. It was 'alive and like to live,' as the poor boys say at the game with the burnt stick. The last time I was at Winchester we used to take him out and put him into the Itchen, and a famous swimmer he is. He never loses a stick by any chance, and he will even dive for a stone, and find it if it is a large one; and what is very odd, if a sailor comes begging, he never barks or flies as he does at other beggars, but looks sad and earnestly at them as if asking for his master, and where he was."

"Oh dear, dear dog!" said Jessie, "what is its name?"

"Grog."

"What an odd name! What does it mean?"

Hugh smiled.

"Why, it means rum and water, and it was called so by the sailors, because when they brought it from Newfoundland it could not eat, and they gave it a little grog every day with some milk in it, and christened it Grog, throwing some on it."

"Where did they get the milk?" asked Fanny.

"They had two goats on board, and they always contrived to save enough for the dog, which was a great favourite; the goats were milked morning and night. One of the little kids belonging to them used to play with Grog, and Captain Mildmay brought it on shore with him; I do not know what is become of it; now I think of it, I should not wonder if it has young ones. I should like to have a kid; if I cannot have one from Mrs. Mildmay, I will ask somebody to get me one."

"What for?" asked Julia.

"What for? why, to bring up and run about on the terraces at the Abbey."

"Well, I daresay they will look very pretty there," said Julia.

"They—yes, I shall have two of them, and spotted."

"I remember a large black goat that Sir Frederick Wentworth had," said Julia, "that always came and went with the cows; it was the tallest goat I ever saw, and with an immense beard; one of the little boys used to ride on it for a little way."

"What do you mean by came and went with the cows?" asked Jessie.

"Why, when the cows were driven to the pasture and back to the dairy."

"Was it as tall as a jackass?" asked Hugh.

"Oh, no; as tall as a calf, perhaps."

"The height of a calf depends on its age," observed Hugh.

"True, I had forgotten that."

"How long mamma is before she comes to-night!" said Jessie; "it is nearly eight o'clock, and I hear the tea-things coming through the hall."

"Mamma and papa have had so much to talk about to aunt that has kept them," answered Ellen; "I suppose I am to make tea; perhaps I had better send Ralph to ask."

"Here they come," said Hugh.

"My dears," said Mrs. Hamilton, "I did not know how late it was. Make the tea directly, my dear Ellen; I am afraid Julia and Fanny are very hungry."

"Oh, no, aunt, we are not particularly hungry; we only wish tea over, that we may begin to play at chess and back-gammon. Hugh thinks he can beat Ellen at chess, and I am anxious to see if he can; I shall like to watch their game."

"If," added she, turning to Ellen (who was busy with the tea-making), "it will not make you uncomfortable."

"Not in the least; I never had anybody watch me, so I do not know what it is."

"Ellen," said Mr. Hamilton, "you are forgetting, and putting sugar in all the cups."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, papa; I must not talk, I find, while I am making tea."

"Shall I make it for you?" asked Hugh; "I am a famous hand at it."

"No, no," said Mr. Hamilton; "I daresay you may be a famous tea-maker, but Ellen is my tea-maker, and she can do it very nicely if she takes pains."

"Papa is rather particular about his tea," said Ellen; "he likes it strong and without any sugar."

"Umph!" said Hugh, "I had rather not have any tea than drink it *sans* sugar. As I have done, may I get the chess table and put out the men."

"Had you not better have one game with Julia?"

"Oh, no, I shall not then have time to play with you, for it is half-past eight. I had rather wait till you have done making this horrid tea."

"Why do you call it horrid; was it not good?"

"Yes, but I want to begin play, and hate people being so long about anything. Now, then, there is the last cup; shall I ring the bell, sir?—I see you are going to do it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hamilton, who was discussing with Mrs. Leslie the loss foreigners had in not comprehending the enjoyment of tea.

"And, indeed," said Mrs. Leslie, "I fear it is going completely out of fashion in England; people dine so late, and think so little of it."

"A proof of exceeding bad taste," observed Mr. Hamilton. "Ellen, my dear, what are you going to do?"

"Play at chess, papa, with Hugh."

"Oh, then, the sooner the things go away the better."

"Chess is very absorbing," said Mrs. Leslie; "do you approve of it?"

"As an amusement—yes, not as an occupation."

"Pray, papa, do not look over me; I find *your* doing so makes me nervous."

"Indeed, Ellen, I must—I must have you bear to be looked at and commented upon, though this is an egregious breach of good breeding, but one must expect to meet with people who break through all observances, and I wish you to preserve yourself free from all taint of the sort, but able to bear it from others."

"My uncle is rather strict, I see," said Julia, looking up.

"I should be sorry to be thought so, my dear Julia; I wish to admonish rather than have to reprove."

A pause ensued, and Mr. Hamilton looked at Ellen, whose grave countenance proclaimed her a losing party.

"Oh, papa, I have got my queen in a corner and cannot release her; I shall be checkmated."

"Yes, there it is," said Hugh; "how d'ye do, Ellen; you are beaten, you see."

"Yes, you play much better than I do, but if I had taken your bishop instead of your knight, it might have made some difference."

"Everybody says or thinks something of the kind after they have lost; I do myself."

"Perhaps you could beat papa."

"We will try our skill to-morrow evening if we are inclined," said her papa; "it is too late to-night." Good night, my dears, go to bed; Fanny has beaten Jessie, I find I shall encounter her some day."

"Dear uncle, will you play with me at draughts?"

"Yes, my dear; gladly."

"I shall like it very much, only I shall feel afraid," said Fanny.

When they were in their own room Julia said, "I am not at all sleepy, but as my cousins go to bed at half-past nine, I did not like to express my wish to stay longer."

"No," said Fanny, "they are such nice girls, I do not want to seem older in any way than they are, and I do not think my uncle would have let them sit up, for he seems particular."

"Yes, but so very good-natured."

"So you like being here as well as at the bishop's."

"Better for some things, but I like Redcliff better than this rectory, pretty as it is, and must be in summer."

"We shall enjoy seeing it all this year, if mamma can stay as long as my aunt seems to wish."

"I have no doubt that she will; it is so long since she has seen that dear aunt of ours, so like herself, except, which is odd enough, that aunt looks stronger than poor mamma."

CHAPTER IX.

"Who is that going downstairs so early?" asked Jessie just as her eyes were open the next morning.

"It is only one of the servants, I should think," answered Ellen.

"Yes, it is, for I heard a door open in the corridor; I
are say it was Hugh, and he is going to skate before break-
fast; I wish we might go and look at him, but I do not like
to go without papa's leave. Shall I go and ask him as soon
as I am dressed?"

"No, better not; I feel certain mamma had rather we
should not go, and so we will not put papa to the pain of
saying no."

"You are so *very* good, Ellen," said Jessie; "I shall
ever be so thoughtful as you are."

"All in good time, you are two years younger."

One morning, when preparing to set off for the lake, the
snow fell so thick and fast that the young party were compelled
to give it up, and to seat themselves round the dining-room
fire, when Ellen applied to Julia to give her promised history
of Madame du Bourg, who was to come to Ashdown in
about a month, it having been settled by Mrs. Leslie, at the
earnest entreaty of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, that she should
remain at the Rectory for the year;—a plan the children had
quite set their hearts on, and Mrs. Hamilton having contrived
to accommodate Madame by moving one of the servants, and
having Annette's bed put up in her room, leaving the room
previously occupied by Annette for Madame du Bourg; and
Mr. Hamilton arranging that the children should take their
lessons together in the library, as they had no regular school-
room, making his dressing-room answer as a study for him-
self for the time being.

The girls sprung about with delight when this plan was
first told to them, and Jessie even longed to begin her lessons!

"I am afraid Madame du Bourg will think me a very bad
Frenchwoman," said she, "but I shall improve daily, I hope;
now tell us about her, please."

"Well, then, to begin; her father was a Protestant clergy-
man, near Geneva, and her mother so beautiful that people
used to stop and look at her as she passed; but that has
nothing to do with her story."

"Where is Geneva?" asked Jessie.

"Do you not know?" said Ellen; "why you have learnt
where it is. In Switzerland; and there is a lake there famous
for its beauty."

"It was on the borders of this lake, that Mr. La Trobe

lived, in a little white cottage covered with roses and myrtles, and there Theresa was born. I daresay she was a beautiful child, but she is too modest to say this of herself. Her father and mother doated on her and her brother, who was just two years older, and the image of his mother. Hand in hand the brother and sister roamed around the little village, which was not far from their home, picking wild strawberries in their little baskets, or gathering flowers for their father to put in his *hortus siccus*; one evening——”

“ Oh ! ” said Jessie, “ what is coming ? ”

“ Do not interrupt, pray,” said Ellen.

“ One evening, on coming back loaded, as usual, with flowers, to their surprise, they were met by Estelle, the old servant, outside the cottage.

“ ‘ Where is your mamma ? ’ said she to Theodore.

“ ‘ I do not know, why do you ask me ? ’

“ ‘ Because she went to meet you, having heard there was a bad fever in the hamlet.’

“ ‘ We have been to Bon Noir ’ (I remember every word, Madame has so often repeated it, observed Julia), said Theodore, ‘ and not through the hamlet.’

“ ‘ Oh, then, your mamma will come presently ; I hoped she would be in time. There is a fine dish of strawberries come from the baron’s, and I have saved a nice bowl of cream.’

“ ‘ Where is papa ? ’ inquired Theodore.

“ ‘ In his study ; I left him there just now.’

“ ‘ We had better not go in ; he does not like to be interrupted.’

“ ‘ We may take the flowers in,’ said Adelaide.

“ ‘ Yes, so we may.’

“ Their father had just laid down his book, and they spent some time in looking at and sorting the flowers. Theodore had just begun to botanize a little.

“ At length the church clock struck seven.

“ ‘ Where can mamma be ? ’ said he.

“ This inquiry led to a repetition of what Estelle had told the children.

“ ‘ Your mistress must be gone farther,’ said Mr. La Trobe, ‘ I will go seek her myself.’

“ He accordingly took his stick and set off. Theodore was *not* old enough to feel some anxiety when eight o’clock

ounded from the old church clock, and his papa came ot.

" 'I want my tea, I want to go to bed,' said Adelaide.

" 'After all I shall have my bowl of cream spoilt,' said Estelle, 'for you must have your tea, poor things, and we annot wait any longer for your mamma, for you want to go to bed, poor child now.'

" Adelaide was accordingly put to bed after her tea.

" 'Pray tell mamma to come and kiss me when she comes n,' said Adelaide to Estelle, as she left the room.

" 'To be sure I will,' said the old servant, and in expectation of this kiss little Adelaide lay some time, the moon hining on her through the casement. She dreamed she saw her mamma, and sprang up to kiss her, but when wide awake ound no mamma there ; she called loudly for Estelle, who ame hurriedly into the room.

" 'Oh, Estelle, I dreamed mamma was by me, but I suppose she is not awake. Why, Estelle, what is the matter ? you have been crying.'

" 'I do not know, Miss Adelaide, except that your papa s not come home.'

" 'Is it time to get up ?'

" 'Yes, dear, and we will watch for your papa.'

" As soon as Adelaide was dressed, they sought for Theodore, and found him crying in the garden. His tears caused Adelaide's to flow, when presently they heard the alarm bell ringing loudly, and saw the peasants running to assemble at the church.

" 'What can that be for ?' thought Estelle. ' Alas ! I fear all is not right.' In about twenty minutes the crowd dispersed, and Mr. La Trobe was seen slowly returning towards his dwelling, with his handkerchief to his eyes. On hearing the deep sobs of his children, who ran to meet him, he took it away, and tenderly pressed them to his heart—he could not speak.

" 'Where is mamma ?' said Adelaide. ' Mamma, mamma, mamma, now wildly shrieking, and comprehending she could not be found.'

" 'You must not do so, you make papa worse,' said Theodore.

" *But I must not be so particular, said Julia ; "it is*

better to say that Mr. La Trobe could only hear of Madame at the first cottage in the hamlet: she found the children had not been there, and no one had seen her since, except a boy who saw her quietly walking on towards another dwelling; he had vainly hunted all night for her in every direction, and at last was forced to admit the fearful idea that some accident had befallen her, she might have fallen from some precipice, it was not probable she would lose her way, so well known to her as was every path around. Mr. La Trobe was just setting off again; but, first I should tell you that he had determined on assembling the villagers, and sending them in different directions to try if any tidings could be heard; so for this purpose, the alarm bell had been rung, and most readily and eagerly did everybody undertake to try and find Madame La Trobe, for dearly was she beloved.

"Well, Mr. La Trobe was just outside the gate when he was met by the Baron de Belleville, who came hastening to offer his condolence and assistance, and in the baroness' name to offer to convey the children to the castle till the present dreadful uncertainty should be terminated. Most gratefully did Mr. La Trobe accept the baron's offer. Theodore and Adelaide were summoned to attend him, but they could scarcely be prevailed on to go; and when poor little Adelaide clung to her father, the baron proposed Estelle walking with them to the castle, whilst he remained at the parsonage till she returned.

"The sobbing children followed, with faltering steps Estelle to the castle, where the faithful creature left them, with a heavy heart. The baroness, who was an invalid, had then taken to her, and endeavoured to soothe and comfort them but she herself was agitated and anxious.

"' May I stand at the window and watch for poor mamma?' asked Theodore.

"The baroness thought it best to indulge him, and he stationed himself in the recess. Adelaide dried her tears when she saw the various toys the baroness had collected for her, on a table by the sofa, where she generally lay reclined.

"' I could eat a little bread and milk,' said Adelaide.

"' My poor children, you have had no breakfast; I will ring for some directly. What do you have for breakfast, my dear Theodore ?'

"Bread and milk, or very weak coffee. What you please, baroness," added Theodore, recollecting himself.

"Some breakfast was brought in, of which little Adelaide partook readily; but Theodore's heart was too full for him to eat.

"By the baroness's persuasion he drank a cup of coffee, and returned to his station at the window, from which he presently called out—

"Oh! what do I see!"

"What do you see, my child?" asked the baroness, rousing herself in her anxiety.

"Oh, dear; there is a crowd, and I cannot see—but mamma—mamma is not there," burst forth the sobbing boy.

"Presently the crowd gave way, and the baroness clearly saw—"

"Oh!" said Jessie, "I am afraid you should go on, Julia."

The door opened before Julia could reply, and Mr. Hamilton appeared, but stopped astonished at the countenances of the group before him.

Ellen's and Jessie's eyes were filled with tears, which had been evidently coursing down their cheeks; Fanny's were suffused with them, and even Hugh was the image of sadness.

"What is the matter, my dears?" asked he hastily.

"Oh, I am telling them Madame du Bourg's history, and it is a sad one, that is all, uncle."

"You must be a skilful narrator, Julia, thus to interest your hearers, but, my dears, you have been sitting here so long, and it is now so fine, that we think it a pity you should not take advantage of it, and go out a little."

His daughters, accustomed to obey, only observed how provoking it was the sun should shine just at such a moment, and Hugh acknowledged he had rather have heard the end of Madame du Bourg's story than go out.

"But," added he, "you will finish it the first opportunity, will you not, Julia? and I will give up anything I may be engaged in to hear it."

Julia readily promised to go on with it when they again assembled. Ellen and Jessie could think and talk of nothing else, and at last Ellen said—

"I think we must forbid the subject, or we shall not help asking questions, which will not be fair."

"That is a very prudent resolve of yours, Ellen," said her mother, who overheard this suggestion. "Jessie, do you think you have resolution enough to refrain from the subject?"

"I will try, mamma, but I shall think of nothing else all day. Oh, if you knew, you would be curious too, mamma, and I long to tell you all I have heard."

"Suppose I were to tell you what follows, Jessie."

"Why, do you know, mamma?"

"Yes, my love, your aunt has told us the substance of what Julia is relating to you."

"Oh mamma, but I will not say one word, and we are all going out, but only in the garden, for papa says the snow is too deep to venture on the roads."

"Jessie, have you done everything you ought to have done this morning?" said her father, coming into the room.

"Yes, papa."

"Think a little."

"Oh, my canary bird, I have forgotten to feed him! I am very sorry; pray forgive me, papa."

"Yes, pray do, uncle," said both sisters, in a breath.

"Well, this once I will forgive you, but if it happens again I must give the bird to Ellen and forbid your attending to him. I happened to go into the room, and saw the poor little thing drooping his wings, and, on looking nearer, discovered all his food gone out of his drawer, and no water in his glass."

"If it had died, I never should have forgiven myself," said Jessie, with tearful eyes; "my dear papa, I am so glad you saw it, I will go directly and feed it, and, as a punishment, I think I will not be present when Julia finishes Madame du Bourg's story."

"No, no, Jessie," exclaimed all the young party, in a breath, "we cannot consent to that; you must inflict a milder punishment on yourself."

"Not go with you to choose a rabbit; that will do."

This was also strongly objected to, but Mr. Hamilton said Jessie was right, and begged they would not interfere.

"Well sir," said Hugh, "can we go and choose it to-day? I never like suspended punishment. Strike at once, not hold the rod over my head."

"I am afraid there is no probability of your going to-day,

unless you go alone ; the snow is too deep, and the paths untrodden."

Unwillingly they relinquished it, and were obliged to confine themselves to the garden, where they contrived, however, to enjoy their exercise for some time. A secret wish arose in the evening, that they could be by themselves to finish the story which had so interested them, but they were accustomed to put a restraint on their inclinations when the indulgence would be contrary to their parents' wishes, and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton particularly enjoyed the society of their children in the evening ; thus they forbore to give birth to their wishes, and amused themselves as usual.

A very sharp frost the following morning allowed the young party to walk to Down Farm, where they found Mrs. Llewellyn, with the "gals," preparing bacon, Winifred and Nelly looking on, and giving assistance when wanted. The size of the flitches astonished the Miss Leslies ; to Ellen and Jessie they were familiar. Winifred soon found her brother, and the rabbits were turned out of the hutch where they generally *resided*, that they might show to advantage.

" I like that white rabbit best, with blue eyes," said Ellen.

" That is not a good one," said Hugh, " let me choose for you, since poor Jessie is not here ; that grey one with a white stripe I like."

Ellen noticed young Llewellyn's eyes fill with tears.

" You do not like to part with that one ; we will not take it," said she.

" It was father's, ma'am," said the poor boy.

" Oh, I would not have it for the world ; give me any one you like."

" I don't mind any of 'em besides, ma'am."

" Then take the white and the brown and white ones," said Hugh.

" Yes, those will do. What are we to give you for them, Edward ; they are your rabbits, I believe ?"

" Mine and Morris's, Miss, but we do not need anything for them."

" I am sure papa will give you something. Jessie," added she, turning to Julia, " will be impatient to see them, but her interest in them will not be so great as if you were not here."

"I should like to take charge of them while I am here," said Hugh.

"I daresay Jessie will be very willing you should, and I quite agree to it," said Ellen.

Mrs. Llewellyn had provided some bread and butter and some *mead* for the young party on their return to the kitchen; of the former they partook with the readiness its excellence invited; of the mead Hugh took some, declaring it "capital."

"Your bread is always nicer than ours," observed Ellen.

"I dunna know, Miss," said Mrs. Llewellyn, "you've had a long walk when you taste it."

"No, it is browner and better."

The rabbits were to be sent in the evening, and the young party met Jessie and her papa coming to meet them as they returned. They found it was some time to dinner, and eagerly proposed seating themselves, after taking off their things, to hear the end of Madame du Bourg's story.

"I had just said," resumed Julia, "that the crowd gave way, and the baroness clearly perceived something borne on men's shoulders, but what it was she could not make out. In extreme trepidation she endeavoured to get a fuller view of the objects visible, when the door of the room opened, and the baron came in, with a countenance of grief and horror.

"'Go, my dears,' said he to the children, 'to Adéle,' and taking Theodore's hand he led him from the window; and gave Adelaide in charge to him, Adéle waiting for them in the hall.

"'My dear baron, what has happened?' exclaimed the baroness.

"The baron could not articulate at first, but, rousing himself, he begged she would summon resolution to her aid, to hear the fatal tidings he had to communicate, thinking it best to prepare her by this preface, aware she had seen the procession from the window, by her attitude and exclamation when he came in.

"'The crowd are going into the gardens at the Parsonage,' said the baroness, 'I see them plainly; oh, tell me all.'

"I will if you will lay down and be as composed as you

can. After the children had left I accompanied poor La Trobe, who could not remain in the house, to the terrace which commands a view of the country below; but he could not remain, and was setting off to try some of the paths round, when Estelle came running to say the miller wished to speak with me. I with difficulty prevailed on La Trobe to remain where he was till I came back, seeing by Estelle's face some sad tidings; awaited him. I did not speak to the poor woman, but ran to the miller, who stood at the door with the tears running down his rough face. I shall shorten his story as much as possible. It seems when he went into the mill, which was at a late hour for him, he saw something floating below the bridge, and, on looking more attentively, perceived it was a lady's veil; he directly called his man, and they saw the body of poor Madame La Trobe, not far from the veil, lying in a shallow where it had been caught, it appeared, by some rough stumps on the bank. They took it out and placed it on a hurdle, the miller's wife bedewing it with tears and following it sobbing as they bore it along. The miller had no one to send to the village but the poor woman who bethought her of having the sad remains deposited in the house, whilst her husband ran to the parsonage to communicate his bitter tidings. I will not attempt to describe my feelings on hearing it, or shock you by relating poor La Trobe's agonies; he insisted on going with me to the mill, and, as the tale spread, all the villagers collected and followed, and each was anxious in his turn to bear the beloved remains of one so dear to them. This was the crowd you saw, and the imperfect object the hurdle with the body covered with the best white sheet the mill could produce.

"I left La Trobe with his departed beloved Adelaide, convinced the more he can now indulge his sorrow the better, and hastened here, fearing some one might precede me, and you suddenly learn the sad tidings unprepared."

"The poor children!"

"The sooner they know what has befallen the better, and I will manage it."

"The baroness, deeply affected, remained immovable till roused by the shrieks of the children."

"The baron brought them to her, and they both tried to soothe and console them, but it was long ere they succeeded."

I cannot describe their meeting with their father, or the funeral of Madame La Trobe, it is so very sad."

"But how did she fall into the water?" asked the sobbing Jessie?

"Oh! about half a mile above the mill there is a bridge, and it is supposed her foot slipped in crossing it, as her basket was found near it. Poor La Trobe's health gave way, and he never recovered the shock of his wife's death! The baroness took a deep interest in the children, and had them constantly with her; and when Theodore was old enough the baron procured a commission for him. He, however, remained with his father during his life; he and Adelaide had taken up their abode at the castle after they lost their father."

"How old were they?" asked Hugh.

"I think Theodore was sixteen, and Adelaide fourteen."

"Oh then, Mr. La Trobe did not die directly."

"No, he lived some years after his wife's death, but he was never well, and always melancholy, except when he tried to be cheerful for his children's sake. The baroness took the greatest pains with Adelaide, and educating her proved very beneficial to her health (her complaint being for the most part nervous), which improved so, she became able to walk and go about like other people. She often took Theodore and Adelaide to their mother's grave, and constantly spoke to them of her wishing to preserve her remembrance in their minds; they were, it is true, in no need of this, as not a day passed that their father did not do the same thing. Well, soon after, Theodore got a commission—that is, soon after he joined his regiment—it was ordered on service, and went from one place to another, till at last in a dreadful battle he was killed, and one of his brother officers, who lived not very far from the baron's, took the sad tidings to his poor sister. He was asked to stay at the castle, as having been the friend of Theodore, and afterwards Captain du Bourg—"

"Oh then, he married Adelaide," exclaimed Ellen.

"Yes, I was going to say, soon afterwards Captain du Bourg became a constant visitor at the baron's, and in the end married our madame; soon after which the baron died, and the castle and all went to some man whom they knew nothing about. The poor baroness did not live long after her husband, and Adelaide had all her trinkets and books. She

accompanied Captain du Bourg wherever he went with his regiment, till the birth of two children made it advisable that she should be settled, and a small house was taken for her where she lived happily with her babes for a short time; but the scarlet fever broke out and she lost her son. In addition to this grief her husband was severely wounded, and, not to make my story so very long, he too died and left poor madame heart-broken with a little girl. She almost starved herself to educate her, but she did accomplish it, and she is now with Lady Barrington as governess to her little girls: it is there Madame du Bourg is staying; she goes to spend a month there every year, and sometimes twice, as it may happen."

"Have you ever seen Miss du Bourg?"

"Oh yes, and if we had been settled, mamma intended to have asked her to come and stay with her poor mother. Lady Barrington is very kind to her."

"Is she pretty?" added Jessie.

"Why yes, rather; she is very fair, and has light blue eyes and a quantity of flaxen hair."

"What is her name?" said Ellen.

"Gabrielle; her father's name was Gabriel, and she is called after him."

"Well, I am glad this melancholy story is over," said Hugh! "I wanted to hear the end of it, but I do not like such dismals."

CHAPTER X.

ON coming down the morning before Christmas-day, Mr. Hamilton observed he had not seen such a true picture of winter for years, realizing all the old poets have portrayed of it.

"If you like poetry, by and by, my dears, you will know what I mean; for instance, here is Thomson whom I can quote:—

'The flakes fall fast and thick and wide, dimming the day with a continual flow.'

But I cannot now repeat the whole of this beautiful description. You can read it if you like in his 'Seasons.' Nor is Cowper behindhand with him; some of his passages are delightful. One line or two I will quote:—

'Fast falls the fleecy show'r, the downy flakes descending softly,
alighting on all below, assimilate all objects.
Earth receives gladly the sheltering mantle, and the green and
tender blade that fear'd the chilling blast,
Escapes unhurt beneath so warm a veil.'

But it is too cold a morning for the snow to come down,
except in the form you see it."

Minute particles were floating in the freezing air which congealed every drop of melted ice which lay by chance on the window-sill. No sound from the animals without, and the blackbirds and thrushes came with the robins and chaffinches to the bread-board at the window, to Jessie's great delight; even a long-tailed tit came and wailed around.

"It is not so happy," said Mr. Hamilton, "as when building its pretty mossy nest in the thorn on the heath."

"What sort of a nest has it, uncle?" asked Julia.

"A long nest, beautifully made, with a very small hole for the going in and out; and in the nest I saw were twelve or thirteen eggs, not much bigger than peas, white, with small spots. The nest is fixed firmly in the fork of a white thorn, generally surrounded by thorns so as to be unapproachable; it must be cut down in the bush, as to attempt to take it out would spoil it. It is of rarer occurrence than many other birds' nests, and a most beautiful thing to look at; but it is seldom seen except by lovers of nature; the shepherd's boy sees many things we lose worthy of observation, the nests of the long-tailed tit, for example."

"I like to find nests," said Hugh, "but I begin to be more particular in taking them than I used to be; I think more of the old birds. I got a great many last spring, though for a friend of my uncle's, who has the nests and eggs of all British birds, and we used to hunt for them to add to his collection. His son, too, is fond of the thing, and his father has bought a capital cabinet for him to put the eggs in; there are shallow drawers with compartments into which the different eggs are put, and all labelled. The boy is very humane, too, and cannot bear to disturb any little bird that takes up *its abode in his father's grounds*. A ridiculous thing occurred *when I was there one spring*: a troublesome old lady, on a *vren's nest being pointed out to her*, tried to put her hand *to the nest*, although *Frederick entreated her not, telling*

her the bird would inevitably forsake it. She was deaf to his pleadings, and finding she could not reach it, actually got a high stool and clambered on it, aged as she was, and felt four eggs, as she triumphantly announced, in the nest. Poor Frederick indignantly exclaimed not one of them would be hatched ; and so it proved, for he sorrowfully told me the wren forsook it. He used to watch for her coming again, but she didn't."

"What a disagreeable old woman!" exclaimed Jessie.

"Well, she was not bad, but she was wrong there," answered Hugh.

"I daresay your friend's cabinet is better than old Sanderson's, Fanny."

"Perhaps so, but Jessie would like to see Sanderson's, for all that."

"A boy very nearly hurt himself very much getting a hawk's nest," said Hugh ; "it was in a thick wood on the top branches of a high tree, and he had clambered up when one of the branches broke, and he fell to the ground ; fortunately it was covered with the spines of the firs, so he was not so much hurt as he might have been, but his face and hands were terribly scratched by the thorns and brambles which grew around, for the hawks take care to have a good fence around their habitations. A man in the village took this very nest when the young birds were fledged, and brought them to my uncle ; and oh, I never shall forget how beautiful they were ! An exact pair with such eyes ! Their fierceness was dazzling ! a very long chain as light as it could be made was put on a leg of each bird, and they were placed on a perch in the garden ; but oh, the difference two days made ! There were the hawks, and an indifferent observer might have fancied them beautiful then, but I could have cried ! their beautiful eyes were dull, and their movements had lost all spirit ! They could not brook being chained, and I resolved in my heart never to deprive a hawk of its glory—that is, of its liberty. I could not have thought of the effect it produced if I had not seen it."

"Right, my boy, I am glad you came to such a conclusion, and witnessed the effect of a chain on the spirited creatures, whose very essence is liberty to go and come. I do not like any wild animal in confinement ; but a bird, whose element is the air, must suffer martyrdom."

"Do you like fishing, Hugh?" asked Ellen; "Sturm says 'the extreme cold like this sometimes kills the fish in fresh water.'"

"It does," said her father, and people should always have holes pierced in the ice for them to come to and breathe in ponds; at least, I have heard it is advisable in such weather as we are now experiencing."

"There were gold and silver fish at my uncle's, in glass globes," said Fanny, "and we used to feed them."

"What with?" asked Jessie.

"Oh, bread and biscuit crumbs; but Sanderson did not like we should give them food often, as he was particular about them; he said they wanted great care."

"Who is Sanderson?"

"One of the old servants that has lived long with my uncle—lived with him when he was a curate in that pretty village he likes to talk about, and used to saddle my uncle's pony for him; he always collected rare things when he could, and used to pick up many curiosities even then. He is quite a naturalist, and has many preserved birds, and so many eggs—one of every British bird, I believe—he keeps them in a case he made on purpose."

"I should like to see them," said Jessie; "perhaps I may some day."

On Christmas Eve (the evening of this day) the village children came in little groups; they could just be discerned through the drawing-room windows in their little red cloaks and black bonnets, with a holly twig in their hands tramping through the snow, which made a crushing noise as it had begun to freeze; the boys in their gaberdines (which did not look *white*, contrasted with the pure snow), and various head coverings of cap or hat, some brimless! They came in groups *wussailing*, as the country people phrase it (derived probably from wassailing), singing two or three verses of carols or songs, and the young ladies gave them all a trifle, which was the common practice.

They had all been in the morning to look at the church, which the clerk had decorated with holly, ivy, and *mistletoe*, (*according to the then received custom*), very prettily. There happened to be plenty of berries on the hollies, and the glossy, bright leaves and coral berries shone all over the Rectory, large

branches having been put in the hall for the purpose of decoration, which was aptly and amply carried out.

"We always have some elder wine brought in, in the old silver saucepan," said Mrs. Hamilton, "and the girls must stay up a little longer to-night to have some, and drink a merry Christmas and happy new year; these old customs will, I dare say, wear out, but I wish my children to remember them."

"And let us have a story, if we can," said Hugh.

"Who is to tell it, for I want to save my voice for to-morrow?" said Mr. Hamilton.

"I can tell you something Dawson told me," said Ellen, "which made me laugh, but it is true."

"Never mind it's being true, we will have it," said Hugh; and at night, when they were sitting round the fire, Ellen began:—

"There was an old woman who lived in Hertfordshire, indeed it was Dawson's mother, for we had been to look at the little new calf, and Dawson told us to be careful, and not let it out of its pen, and then told us what happened to her mother. Mrs. Richardson, that was her name, who lived in the woods in Hertfordshire, invited some of her relations from London to come and spend the day with her, which they accordingly did. The little maid had set out the best china tea service, in the best parlour, and put the bread and butter and cakes on the little round table, which was always used on company occasions, and the party had gone to see the cows milked, the syllabub made, and the calves suckled, when one of the visitors opened the door of the calf-pen, and out rushed the calves, almost knocking down a little girl of the party. One of the calves ran into the kitchen, through the house into the parlour, with its tail bolt upright, and galloping round, threw down the tea-table and all its contents; spilt the cream on the carpet (which had been uncovered in honour of the company), and broke some of the china; rushed out into the yard, and gave the cowman a fine chase to catch him!"

"It must have been fine fun to see the calf run about the room with its tail bolt upright," said Hugh, "though poor Mrs. What's-her-Name might not think so; calves always do scout about when they are let loose, after being shut up; I have often seen them."

Soon after Ellen had finished telling Dawson's tale, a loud

ringing of bells was heard, and a really pretty tune played by the carters on the bells which the horses in a team sometimes wear, and of which the drivers are very proud. It is very pleasing to hear a bell team in a rural country, as one often does, when walking in some secluded spot—first the faint tinkling, and then the full rush of the bells, as the waggon and its fine black-harnessed team come in sight, winding, it may be, down a lane with high chalk banks on either side.

"I have often stood to hear and enjoy the sight," observed Mr. Hamilton, adding, "our concert is over now; this is the *finale*, no more men, or children will come; they are gone round to the kitchen door to wish a happy Christmas. I have just done the same to them, and bidden them good night."

"Why, we did not hear their footsteps," said Jessie.

"No, the snow prevented that; I guess it will be a hard frost by to-morrow morning;" and so it was, and continued to freeze sharply. A happy party met at the breakfast-table, to wish a happy Christmas and new year. The sun shone gloriously, and the hollies and yews sparkled with their silvery foliage, as they were edged with the hoarfrost. All the party walked to church except Mrs. Hamilton, and it was pleasant to see the crowded edifice, and the reverence of the rustic congregation, and the respect with which they listened to their pastor. After the sermon was ended, no one thought of stirring till the parson's family had gone out, and in the churchyard good wishes were exchanged; and snow-white frocks, or gaberdines, as they are called in some counties, *smock* frocks in others, and *slops* in Norfolk, red cloaks and black bonnets, of diminutive size, swarmed on all sides.

"What a pretty sight!" said Mrs. Leslie, "it is a long time since I have seen such a congregation as this; and here are faces I remember years ago."

"We have no time to spare," said Mr. Hamilton, "as we must dine precisely at three, and have a large party in the kitchen; so pay your compliments quickly," added he to Mrs. Leslie, laughingly, as she shook hands with some of her old acquaintances, who stood bowing and curtseying round.

"Fanny," said her sister, "we have only roast beef and *plum pudding* for dinner to-day."

"So much the better, you know I like all the old *ways*."

"I wonder what Annette will say to the *company*," said Jessie, "there are six old women and four old men."

"I think she will amuse them," said Julia, "with her broken English."

"What a nice old Christmas Day!" said Mrs. Leslie, as they bade good night. "Oh, dear old England! how I love you and your healthful customs!"

"No more skating," said Jessie, the next morning, "I hear the rain against the window. Well, we shall find plenty to do, if the frost does go, but I am always rather sorry, except for the birds."

"So am I," said Ellen, "as I like to see it snow, and to walk in it."

"Hugh will be sorry, but he will go and shoot, which will amuse him as well, and he is to go with us to the park, but the roads will be too bad for some time."

At breakfast, the young party lamented over the impassable state of the roads, when Mr. Hamilton suddenly said—

"Well, I have a scheme which will console you; it is not a nice day for a first visit to the park, but, nevertheless, I purpose going, and taking you all, except your mamma and aunt, in the servants' waggon; it is impervious to wet, and will hold a large party. Hugh can walk, if he likes it better than driving with us, but there is more than room. I mean to call at Colonel De Lancey's, and ask Lord Mortimer if he will go, and we will take provisions, and dine in the hall, after which you can play at battledore and shuttlecock, or bagatelle. What say you, children; shall you like it?"

"Oh, thank you, uncle," said Julia and Fanny, and "thank you, papa," was echoed by Ellen and Jessie.

"I shall like it very much, and will drive, if you like, sir."

"Ring the bell, will you, my boy? I must send Roger to apprise Mrs. Meredith of the large party she is to expect, and that we shall make an onslaught on her mince pies."

"Those very mince pies we saw her making," said Jessie, clapping her hands.

They set off, a happy party, took up Lord Mortimer, who was too happy to join them, and, on arriving at the park, found Mrs. Meredith looking unusually bright.

"Why, Mrs. Meredith," said Mr. Hamilton, "you look

delighted at having your castle taken by surprise ; do you consider how many of your mince pies we shall devour ?”

“ And welcome too, sir ; but it is not altogether that, as you may guess ; hav’nt you got a letter, sir ?”

“ No, why, what letter ?”

“ Oh sir, I am very glad to see you all ; but a letter from Italy this morning has come, and my dear lady and all of them will be here, provided all goes well, this spring.”

“ This is news, indeed ; I wonder I have had no letter ; what can be the reason ?”

“ Please sir,” said the servant, “ the postman did not come to our house this morning before we started.”

“ To be sure not, it was before his hour, I believe ; or I was so full of coming here, I forgot to inquire about them.”

“ You can see my letter, sir,” said Mrs. Meredith, handing it, as she spoke, to Mr. Hamilton.

“ Well, this is good news, indeed, and I congratulate myself as heartily as I do you, Mrs. Meredith ; and now, will you show these young ladies and gentlemen the house ? I suppose it will be no inconvenience to you, our dining here.”

“ Oh dear no, sir.”

“ But your mince pies will be eaten ; I have brought no mince pies.”

“ To be sure not, sir, there are plenty for double the party. I should have known the Miss Leslies anywhere ; how like they are to their aunt and cousins !” and taking down the keys, she preceded the happy group to the gallery first, and, as Jessie stipulated, for fear anything should interrupt them in their career, and wanting to show them the portraits of the little girls.”

“ Which do you like best, Hugh ?” asked she when they were displayed.

“ That with the dark hair and eyes.”

“ That is Lady Dorothea.”

“ I like the light one best,” said Julia ; “ she looks so sweet.”

“ They are both beautiful,” said all the party, “ and we must come and hear about them this week, now the family are really coming.”

“ Why, don’t you know all about them ? What is there to hear ?”

"Oh! Mrs. Meredith can't bear to speak of them, and their mamma could not look at these pictures without its making her ill, so Lord Montreville had them removed; but this she could not bear, so he put them back; but as he often came to the gallery, and it affected him to look at them, they were turned to the wall. Besides, he dreaded her coming any time unexpectedly, as it had such an effect on her."

By the time they had gone over the mansion the old clock had struck twelve.

"Only an hour to dinner," said Hugh; "we must have a game at battledore and shuttlecock before."

"Agreed," said all the party, and to the great hall they ran, where the shuttlecocks flew about, "for all the world like white swallows," as Phœbe observed.

"Except that swallows glide and sweep along as it were," said Hugh, when Phœbe had passed on through the hall where she had been sent by Mrs. Meredith.

"What birds do dart along?" said Fanny.

"Why, blackbirds and thrushes, I think," said Julia, "but I cannot keep up if I talk."

"How many are you?" asked Hugh.

"Two hundred and thirty," shouted Lord Mortimer, who was playing with her. Fanny and Jessie played together till Fanny's arms ached so she was obliged to leave off. The conquerors were Julia and Hugh.

"I remember my grandmother saying she knew two ladies who were playing at Balls Park, in Hertfordshire, and kept it up two thousand, but one of them fainted at the last stroke."

"I should like to keep up so many," said Jessie, "but we cannot play any longer, for here comes Phœbe to tell us the dinner is ready."

They were a very merry party, insisting on Mrs. Meredith dining with them. She protested against it, but was prevailed on, especially as they said there was no one to carve for them.

The mince pies proved most excellent, and there was a famous plum pudding of Mrs. Meredith's concocting, in which was a ring which "whoever was the fortunate finder of in their piece of pudding was to have a present," Mrs. Meredith said, "*before the year was out.*"

"I have got it," said Julia, "it is on my fork."

"Now, we shall see if there is any truth in what you say, Mrs. Meredith."

"Why, Miss Leslie, it is come true, for you have got the ring, and it is a gift, of course."

This occasioned much mirth, and everybody wanted to see the ring which had fallen to Julia in her helping of pudding.

"We will have a ring next year, if mamma will let us," said Jessie.

"Yes, but it is only fun when there is a large party," said Ellen.

After dinner they played at bagatelle, and when the shadows began to fall, hide and seek was agreed on.

"It is the most famous place in the world for it," said Hugh; "such up and down stairs and odd corners. I will be seeker first, and carry Mrs. Meredith with me."

"Oh! sir, but I can't run, remember."

"Ah! well, I will excuse you after I have found one or two."

"I vote we do not go upstairs at all," said Lord Mortimer, "provided there are rooms enough to hide in below."

"Well, my lord, there's the banqueting-room, the saloon, the dining-room, and the two lower galleries. I don't like to open the drawing-room, because there are so many knicknacks there."

"By no means," said all unanimously, "we shall have plenty of space."

"And now off with you, and I'll stay with Mrs. Meredith till you are hidden. You must give a loud shout, mind."

"I tell you what," said Hugh, "let me be finder first, and then you will know more about the place."

"Ah! that will be better," said Julia.

"Very well, then, I shall not want Mrs. Meredith till I have found you all."

Away they went, disposing of themselves in various places, putting Lord Mortimer among the folds of the velvet curtains, Ellen and Jessie finding places for Julia and Fanny, and then calling to Lord Mortimer, who gave a loud hoo-hoop, and Hugh, after a time, discovered them all, but had a severe chase after Lord Mortimer, who darted up the great staircase, but was at length caught, Mrs. Meredith even laughing at the race, to the Hamilton girls' delight, it was so rare to see the good housekeeper in such spirits.

"Now, Master Hugh, I will try if I can't soon find and catch you," said Lord Mortimer.

"I think," said Julia, "it would be better if we were all to be seekers first, and then, Hugh, you will have shown Lord Mortimer where the hiding-places are."

"Oh! if you like, but I'll be bound to find you all."

Accordingly the young ladies took their turn in hiding and seeking first.

At last it came to Lord Mortimer's turn to find, and all were discovered but Hugh, who completely baffled him, and in despair he went to the housekeeper's room.

"Oh! do come and help me, it is getting dark," said he.

"Yes, indeed," said Ellen; "and we are to go home soon. We will all hunt this last time."

"Well, we have searched every nook and corner and cannot find him," said all the party.

"Hark! what was that?" said Ellen.

"Where did it come from?" said Julia.

"I don't know; the moon is so bright we can see better than we could an hour ago, and I do not like to give up."

"Oh! no, no," said all the party, "try the saloon again. He may have got into that old trunk."

Away they ran and opened it, but it was full of music, and while shutting it down, "hoo-hoop" echoed along the galleries, and thither they ran. The moon shone in splendour, and showed all the figures on the pedestals which were ranged on each side.

"Might not the sound have come from the other gallery?" suggested Julia; "we will all go and look there again, and Fanny, you can stay here, you are so tired."

Accordingly they left Fanny, who sat down in one of the window seats in the recess, and was looking out at the moon, when a loud "hoo hoo, hoo hoo" startled her, and she was about to call them back when a large owl flapped by who had, as we read figuratively in Gray's beautiful elegy, "been complaining to the moon," and perhaps of the unusual turmoil where in general his "reign" was not "molested!"

Fanny watched the bird of night sail away and was looking on vacancy when a sound near startled her, and turning round she saw, or fancied she saw, the helmet of one of the figures in armour move. She felt rather frightened, but

remained quiet, till she distinctly saw it again, and then she screamed and ran away as fast as she could, calling for Julia, who soon joined her with all the party, to whom she told what had occurred.

"Nonsense, it must have been fancy."

"Hoop, hoo-hoop," again resounded.

"That came from the saloon, I am sure," said Ellen; and thither they ran, but could not discover Hugh, and agreed to give it up, going to tell Mrs. Meredith so, who was busily setting out the tea-table, for a message had come that they might accept Mrs. Meredith's pressing invitation and stay to tea, as it was a bright moonlight night. They had hardly entered the room when Hugh, with a shout, joined them.

"Beaten! beaten to all intents and purposes," said he.

"Where could you be?" said all the party in a breath; "we hunted every likely place, almost every crevice, I really think."

"I don't mean to give it up," said Lord Mortimer; "I'll have another turn some other evening, if Mrs. Meredith will allow me."

"So do, my lord, and welcome. I would not give in," said the pleasant housekeeper, to whose nice repast of tea and innumerable cakes and buns they all did ample justice, declaring her cakes were inimitable. "Uncle's were very good, but yours are better," said the Leslies, and Hugh agreed. "I shall get your secret for them for the man at Slough," said he.

"No, don't, sir; it will make him angry, perhaps," said she.

"I don't care, I like your cakes, and will try and have some for the fellows to taste, that is, if you will give it me."

"To be sure I will."

Soon after tea, Roger sent in to say the wagonette was ready, and they prepared to depart, after settling with Mrs. Meredith that they should come and have another game to find Hugh when Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Leslie could spare them.

"And while it is moonlight, if you please, young ladies."

"Oh, yes; we never thought of that."

They arrived in high spirits at the Parsonage, the moon shining brilliantly; and on detailing the events of the day, it was settled they should go again to the park on the fourth evening from the one they had spent there, which they did, and Hugh had again hidden himself, and given his "Hoop—

Hoop ;" and Fanny was again *hors de combat* in the gallery. She leaned forward to look at a deer which was lying in a bed of fern, under some oaks, when a loud "Hoop" startled her, and presently all the party came running in.

"I'm sure it came from here," said they. "Fanny, where did it come from, what part of the gallery?"

"I cannot tell. I was not looking about; I was only looking at a beautiful stag lying in the dry fern, and thinking what a comfortable bed he had got."

"Did you look behind Hercules, as you passed by? because I think it is likely he is there, and shifted round as you looked."

"A good thought, come along," and away again they flew, and Fanny had resumed her "*mooning*," as Hugh called her fancy for the moon, when the same noise she had heard once before startled her : she felt a little frightened, but said to herself—

"It may be a rat," when close to her a statue seemed to move. She could not help a loud scream, which brought the party back in no time; but all was again still, and they were debating what to do, when the arm of the warrior in armour was suddenly raised, and they all drew back, not a little astonished.

A loud laugh came from the statue, which in the next moment descended from the pedestal, and Hugh shouted—

"Pull off my helmet, Mortimer, and proclaim me king of hide and seek."

"It is indeed, Hugh," said Fanny, scarcely believing her eyes. "How did you manage to get there?" asked they all, "and what a capital hide!"

"Yes; I was looking for a nook, when Saunders came by, and said, 'if I was you, sir, I would get into the armour of my old lord ;' and with his help I managed it: but I could not help moving a little the other night, which frightened Fanny, and I could not tell her, for fear my voice should frighten her still more, so there I staid half choked; and was so amused when you hunted all round for me in vain, oh! such good fun, but for the dust, and being so closely shut up, and having to stifle my laughter."

Hugh was now assisted out of his prison, Mrs. Meredith having been first summoned to see the hog in armour, as he called himself.

"Well, to be sure, it was a good thought; I never thought to see my lord's great grandfather move from his pedestal."

"Whose armour was it?" asked Hugh.

"The old baron's, Mr. Hugh. I daresay you never took any notice of him before?"

"No indeed; but he has done me good service now."

"Dear me; all these things must be looked to, and well dusted and cleaned. You are all over dust, sir; do come and be brushed, and then, if you please, you must all come and hear about the pictures, while I am at leisure, young ladies."

"We mean to this week," said Ellen; and accordingly one fine morning the young ladies walked with Mr. Hamilton to the park, where he left them seated round Mrs. Meredith's round table, Foudy reposing on the hearth-rug, and Tiny covered up, that he might not sing and interrupt his mistress or distract her hearers' attention.

"Well, young ladies, to go back to my lord's wedding, and begin from that; it was a grand and happy one, and my lady the beauty of the county, and as good as she was pretty. Lord Hume, their eldest child, was born at the Beeches, and Mr. Devereux too, and when they came here, they were six and five years old, and such handsome boys! but my lady had set her heart on a girl, and at last one came, the year after they came here, and my lady was so doatingly fond of it, and a pretty creature she was, but very delicate, and she only lived to be four years old! My lady took on sadly, as Nurse Meadows said, and had not recovered her spirits when twins were born."

"Oh! Lady Dorothea and Lady Mabel," exclaimed Jessie.

"Hush, Jessie, you are not to interrupt," said Ellen.

"My lady was so pleased, and for the matter of that so was my lord, and two such lovely babies were never seen, they were the admiration of the whole neighbourhood; their sister was pretty, but not to be compared to the twins. Such a delight to their mamma, who could hardly trust them out of her sight, and taught them herself, in spite of the governess; and it was so pretty to hear them saying, 'Now, mamma, I am come to say my lessons to you.' She gave herself up to them, as it were, entirely; indeed, if it was not my dear lady, I might say she made them her idols. Their others were very fond of them, too, and my lord seemed as

if he never could admire them enough, as they ran hand in hand over the lawns, and amongst the flowers, looking like lilies and roses themselves. So they grew till they had passed their sixth birthday, which was kept with great rejoicings here, and all the neighbourhood came. I well remember I was tired, and went to bed as early as I could well do. I slept heavily, when a cry of fire roused me. I put on some clothing, and ran to where it seemed to come from, and then flew to my lady's apartments, where, to my horror, the smoke was stifling. I turned to the door opening on the terrace, and there saw my lord and numbers of people, helping as well as they could, but flew to the wing, where the children slept, and where the efforts of the crowd were directed, as there, it seems, the fire broke out. All was hidden by the smoke, till the flames burst through; and although all means were tried, nobody could reach the apartments, as the roof had fallen in. After some time the fire was quenched, and then the fearful truth burst on everybody, that the sweet children must have perished in the flames."

"Oh! Mrs. Meredith, I can't bear to hear they were really burnt. It is so dreadful," said Jessie.

"Be quiet, Jessie," said Ellen's tearful voice.

"Ah, Miss Jessie, it was not quite so bad, but terrible enough, when the ruins were searched, my lord himself directing, and working harder than anybody, he had saved his sons himself, working frantically, I may say. Two large beams were found to have fallen crossways, and under them, on two others, was the bed, and there lay the precious children in each other's arms, looking like angels, indeed, for the fire had not touched them, although they were lifeless. My lord fainted, and was carried away, and I had the bed and the dear bodies removed, without disturbing anything, to another room, where I myself took charge of them, feeling sure my poor lady would want to see them, as they were found before anything was moved, and I was right in my supposition, as it proved when she was roused from insensibility, for she had fit after fit, from the first alarm, and then became insensible, and her woman could not leave her. My lord came when he recovered from his faint, and I thought my heart would have broken to see and hear him.

"'My wife! my wife! Dear bereaved mother oh, who

will be the consequences, my sweet, sweet children!' said he, his voice broken by sobs.

"They are angels now, my lord,' I ventured to say; 'angels indeed.'

"True, true, Mrs. Meredith; this will have its weight in due time, but at present my senses even seem absorbed, and I can only weep! Leave me, pray; I will ring for you soon!"

"And I came away and went to my lady's room, that is, to her boudoir, where I could hear any one coming out of her room; and in a few moments Mrs. Parkinson, her own maid, came and flew to me, catching my hand.

"Oh, I am so glad,' she said, 'you are here; my dear lady knows the worst, and bears it better than we feared; but she *prays* to see the children.' Here Parkinson could not speak for choking sobs, and begs to see my lord.

"I told her where he was, and that I thought, under the circumstances, I had better go to him, as the sooner my poor lady was indulged the better.

"She thought so too, and I went and spoke to him through the door; which, at the mention of my lady, he immediately opened, and went to her. I dreaded her coming; I need not! She came; and, going up and looking at them, turned once away with clasped hands; then, fondly kissing their fair cheeks, and smoothing their fair hair—I say fair, although one was dark—knelt down by them, my lord supporting and kneeling with her. I left the room, and waited outside till he called me. She kept up till after the funeral, which was the saddest sight. It was a walking funeral; all the school girls in white carried the coffins by turns, and they had strewn white lilies all the way to the church, and solemn music played till everybody's heart was well-nigh broken; but my lady bore it, and some one heard her say, 'I shall go to them.' After the ceremony she sunk, and her life was despaired of; but after a while she rallied and slowly recovered so far as to be able to go about again, but she never looked as she was wont to do. The first time she went into the gallery she was ill after it, and my lord had the pictures taken away; however, she begged they might go back, and by degrees got to look at them, and then so dwelt upon them that my lord persuaded her not to come to the gallery, and old Admiral Seymour had them turned to the wall, for he said it so affected him to look at them; and, as for keeping his eyes away

when he came into the gallery, he could not ; it was like a fascination to him. He is a great judge of painting and very fond of pictures, and almost always lived in the gallery ; but this was after my lord and lady went abroad,—how it will be when they come back I cannot say. Mr. Devereux being so dangerously ill was lucky, for it took up my lady's thoughts, and drew her from her great grief, and in seeing him grow better she became herself again ; but I can't think, young ladies, she will ever quite recover the shock, and I shall dread her going into the gallery the first time. I must not let the pictures be turned to the wall, poor, poor lady !—but she will like to look on them in after years, when time has done its work. Oh, what a blessed thing it is, and what a mercy that time should work such things!"

Here Mrs. Meredith stopped and wiped her tearful eyes, and her young listeners all followed her example, and then with one accord begged to go directly to the gallery and look at the ill-fated, sweet sisters, talking all the way and asking questions about the calamitous fire.

" It was never found out how it originated, young ladies ; I have dreaded fire ever since, and always shall ; one can never be too careful."

They remained a little while, looking first intently at the children, and then at the other members of the family, especially Lady Montreville, and then slowly walking downstairs, took leave of Mrs. Meredith with many thanks, and could talk of nothing all the way home but of the terrible fire. When they arrived they found another arrival had taken place, and Julia and Fanny ran to warmly embrace a sweet-looking woman, who the Hamiltons guessed directly was Madame du Bourg, and were immediately introduced to her, and felt themselves at once at home with her. If she had, amid her many attractions, a distinguishing one, it was sweetness ; you seemed to love her at once, and when her story rushed on Ellen and Jessie, they could have kissed and comforted her.

A few days passed happily away, and then came a time for the lessons to commence, and for Hugh to depart for Eton and Lord Mortimer to France. They parted with mutual regret and a hope of meeting in the summer, and having unnumbered games of cricket, etc.

"And Evelyn will be here, we hope," added Julia and Fanny in a breath.

"Yes, and I trust," said Mr. Hamilton, "we may all meet again at Ashdown Parsonage."

THE END.

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